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Rolling Stone

NFL SPECIAL

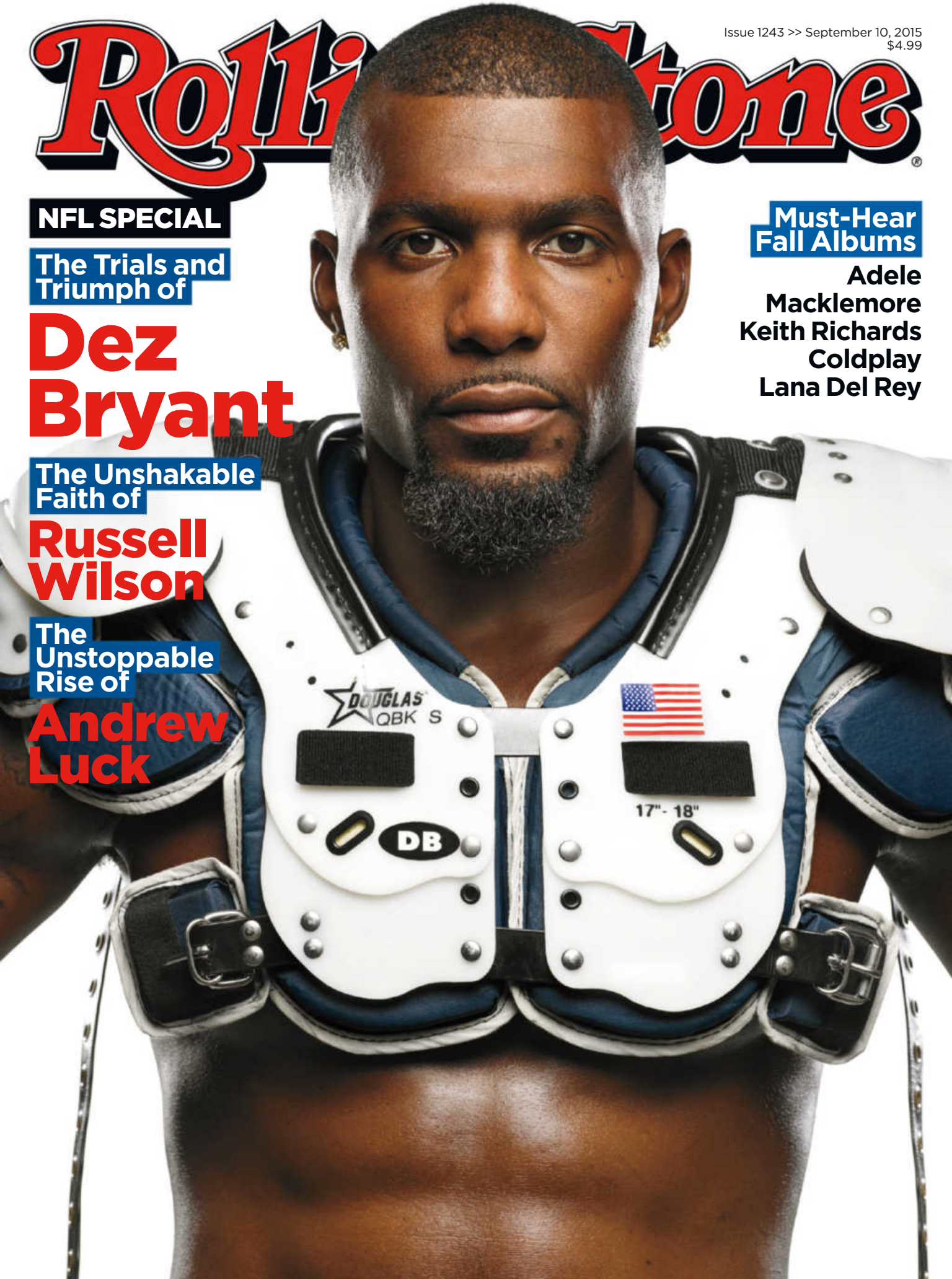
The Trials and Triumph of
Dez Bryant

The Unshakable Faith of
Russell Wilson

The Unstoppable Rise of
Andrew Luck

Must-Hear Fall Albums

Adele
Macklemore
Keith Richards
Coldplay
Lana Del Rey



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RS 1973

"All the News That Fits"

Dez Bryant in New York in July

MARK SELIGER

NFL 2015

FEATURES

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Russell Wilson: The Chosen One
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PLUS

The NFL's biggest team of misfits; inside the new rule that will change the game; and more.

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RS Reports: The Unraveling of a Bitcoin Kingpin *Pg. 34*
Movies *Pg. 68*

ON THE COVERS

Dez Bryant photographed in New York on July 21st, 2015, by **Mark Seliger**.

Andrew Luck photographed in San Francisco on July 13th, 2015, by **Mark Seliger**.

Russell Wilson photographed in North Hollywood on July 2nd, 2015, by **Mark Seliger**.

BRYANT: Grooming by Birgitte at Sally Harlor. Styling by Benjamin Sturgill.
LUCK: Grooming by Erin Gallagher.
WILSON: Grooming by Mark Jacob Baysinger.

ROLLINGSTONE.COM

EXCLUSIVE

JIMI HENDRIX: LIVE IN 1970

"We plan for our sound to go inside the soul of the person," Hendrix says in an archival video from the new Showtime documentary *Jimi Hendrix: Electric Church*. Head over to RollingStone.com to see an exclusive clip of the legend performing "Purple Haze" for one of his biggest crowds ever, at the Atlanta International Pop Festival just months before his death.

RS FILMS

SHERYL CROW UP CLOSE

See Crow perform at Nashville's tiny Bluebird Café and talk about her past life singing McDonald's jingles, her current life in Music City and more. Presented by Patrón.

MUSIC

YO LA TENGO: LIFE IN 15 SONGS

The indie-rock heroes from Hoboken, New Jersey, share the stories behind the songs that made them – from 2000's "You Can Have It All" to "I'll Be Around," off 2013's *Fade*.

TV

THE RISE OF THE UNDEAD

We show how zombies went from drive-in movies to mainstream dominance in pop culture. Read all about it while you're anxiously waiting for the next bloody apocalypse.

THIS WEEK ON

HUFFPOST LIVE

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR THE WIN

Social media during award shows has become the most entertaining aspect of the experience. We take a look at how important it's become in keeping award programs relevant.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION AT HUFFPOSTLIVE.COM ON AUGUST 31ST

Miley Cyrus

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CORRESPONDENCE LOVE LETTERS & ADVICE

Comedy Mogul

KEVIN HART'S ON THE COVER of ROLLING STONE not only because he's funny, but because he's spent years paying his comedy dues ["Kevin Hart's Funny Business," RS 1241]. "All shots to my pride have been taken," he tells Jonah Weiner. It's nice when the hard work pays off and the success is deserved.

Jayson Read, via the Internet

THE SCENE WHERE HART buys all that Cartier bling just because he can? Priceless. It's rare for an artist to let a reporter see something so totally unguarded.

Richard Cohen, via the Internet

SAYING YOU DON'T WANT your son to be gay but you're not homophobic – isn't that like a white person saying they don't want their son to marry a black woman but they're not racist?

Sheila Evans, Eureka, CA

Yemen in Flames

MATTHIEU AIKINS' ARTICLE is sadly accurate ["Yemen's Hidden War," RS 1241]. The Saudis don't care about human lives, and Yemen's elites (and armed factions) will continue to have food, medicine and diesel because they can outbid or bully the poor masses for those limited supplies. Whoever rules Yemen is unlikely to be our friend, but just to govern the country, they'll need the infrastructure the Saudis are destroying. The foreign intervention is a pointless, unqualified disaster.

Nick Meron, via the Internet

IT'S EASY TO TAKE THE WORK of investigative journalists for granted, though we depend on them to educate us about complicated events. I often forget that these reporters put themselves in real physical danger to file their stories. My thanks to Matthieu Aikins for his rich and deeply nuanced reporting on Yemen and other countries in the region.

Kate Durbin, via the Internet

Climate in Chaos

Meteorologist Eric Holthaus' story about how the terrifying impacts of climate change are already being felt around the world was RS.com's highest-traffic piece ever ["The Point of No Return," RS 1241]. "I've thought a lot about why it took off the way it did," says Holthaus. "The number-one comment, after 'Holy shit, this is scary,' was 'What can we still do?' There is a strong engagement from people wanting to help change the trajectory, even if the cause feels lost. You don't want to just resign yourself to the fact that the next few hundred years are going to be really difficult for every species on the planet."

WHAT MORE HAS TO BE written or reported to convince Americans that climate change is real and underway? The climate echo chamber has paralyzed the country. And we don't care.

Lauren Shaw
Via the Internet

HEARTBREAKING STORY. On behalf of my species, please accept my apologies.

Carol Brown, via the Internet

I'VE NEVER SEEN THE PACIFIC Northwest as beautiful as I have in the past few years. But the warm days come with a price. We no longer have our normal snowpack, and we're seeing rising acidity levels. I fear we've finally gone too far.

Jon Unruh, via the Internet

SCORCHED EARTH Drought and climate change have increased wildfires.

THANK GOODNESS MAN-made climate change is nothing more than a job-killing liberal hoax. Can you imagine how bad things would be if all these pinko hippie scientists were actually on to something?

Eric Peter, Wexford, PA

Sweet James

SO GLAD JAMES TAYLOR included "Secret o' Life" on his list ["My Life in 15 Songs," RS 1241]. It's been a favorite of mine since the LP was first released. I transferred it to mixed tapes, then to CD and now iPod. That "little patch of sunlight" in which James wrote it still shines.

Angela Moon, Memphis

Stewart Signs Off

IT'S THE END OF AN ERA ["Is There Anyone Left to Trust?" RS 1241]. Jon Stewart's exit was depressing given that he was the only anchor delivering real news.

Leo Royce, via the Internet

Southern Gothic

I HAVE BEEN A HUGE DRIVE-By Truckers fan for a dozen years ["Jason Isbell's New Morning," RS 1241]. The first time I saw them live, Jason Isbell's voice and songs just soared over everything else. His departure from the band was both disappointing and mysterious. Thank you for shedding light on this amazing artist. I hope he deals with all the heartache but still keeps writing about it.

Mike Duggan, Montreal

New Psychedelics

GREAT TO SEE COVERAGE OF my favorite artist ["Tame Impala's Vision Quest," RS 1241]. The laid-back, psychedelic music the band creates led me to believe that Kevin Parker was anything but stressed, so it came as a surprise that the man behind the sound is having a hard time loosening up.

Jack Helweg, via the Internet

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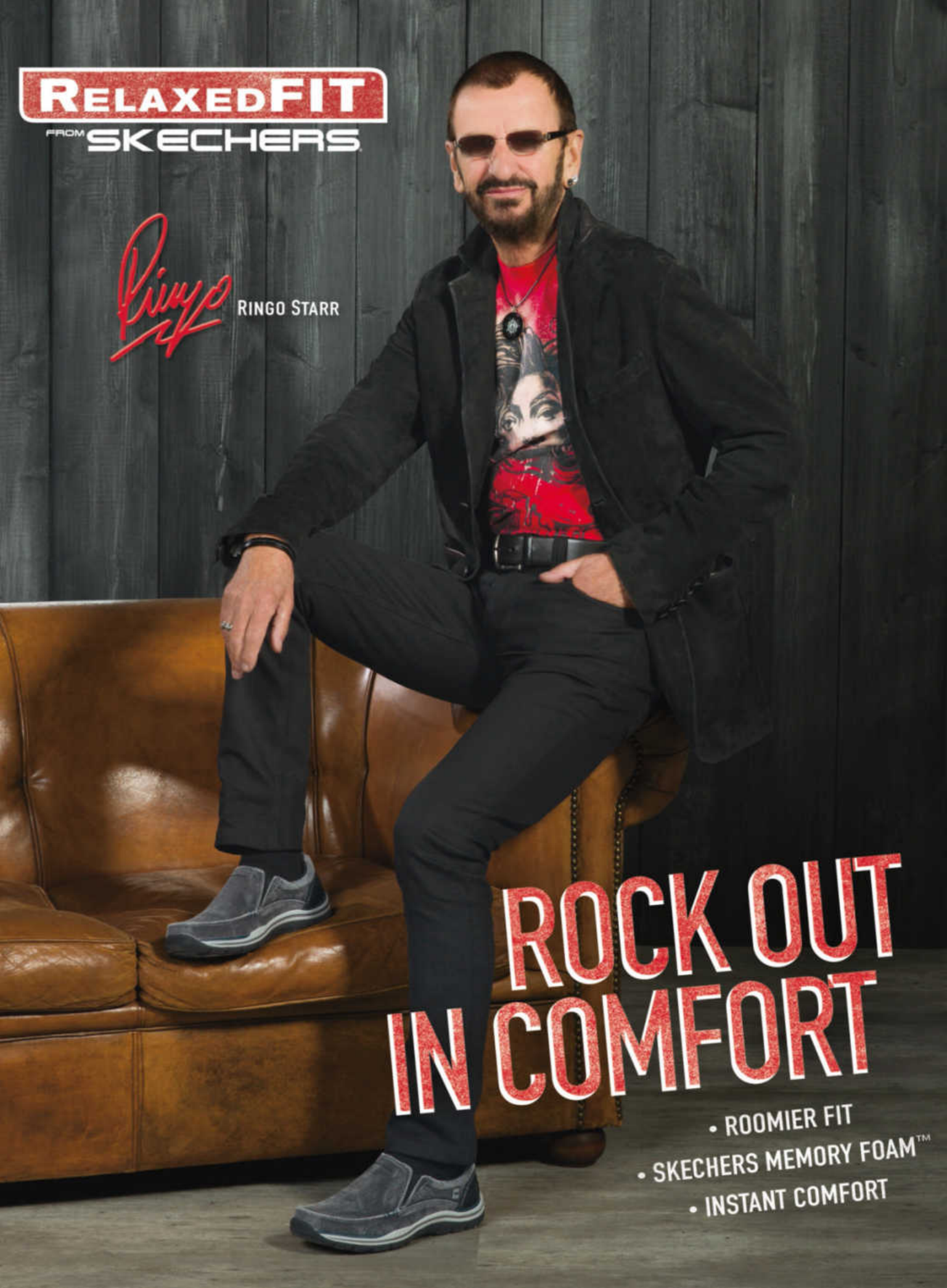
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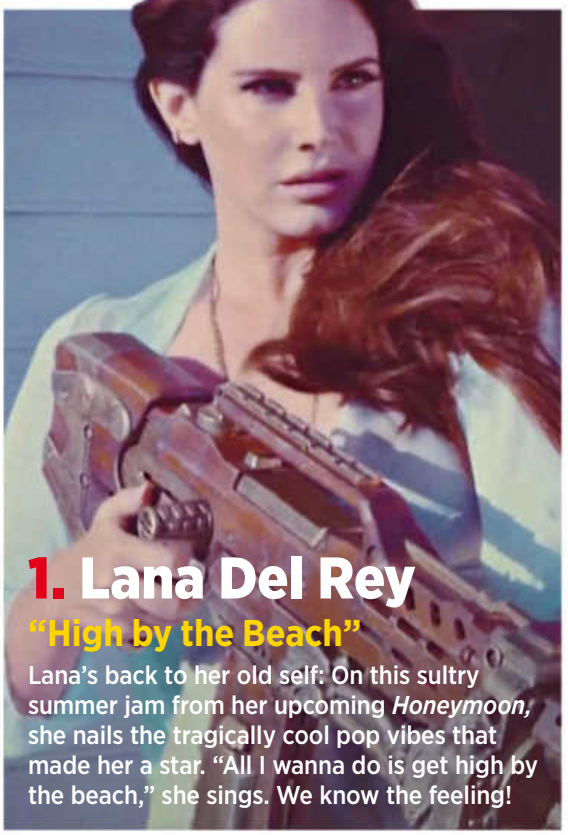


1. Lana Del Rey

"High by the Beach"

Lana's back to her old self: On this sultry summer jam from her upcoming *Honeymoon,* she nails the tragically cool pop vibes that made her a star. "All I wanna do is get high by the beach," she sings. We know the feeling!

2. Potty Mouth

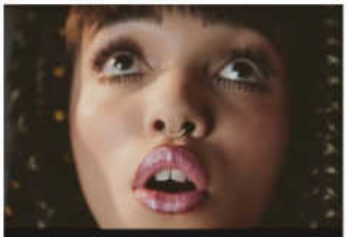
"Cherry Picking"

A little bit of Breeders, a little bit of Cars and a lot of can't-miss hooks – this irresistible single from the Massachusetts act is as much fun as you're likely to find in a new alt-rock song this decade.

3. Deerhunter

"Snakeskin"

Ever had a Bowie phase? Sure you have. Bet you didn't take it as far as Deerhunter, though. Their new tune is a sleek shot of *Young Americans* style.



4. FKA Twigs

M3LL155X EP

No one does sexy-nightmare music like FKA Twigs. Her excellent new EP is full of dark, twisted beats and melodies that will haunt your brain for days.

5. Bikini Kill

"Playground"

The original riot grrrls were friends and peers of grunge acts like Nirvana and Mudhoney. You can hear it on this sludgy, doomy rarity from a reissue of their 1991 classic *Revolution Girl Style Now*.

6. Escort

"Animal Nature"

Groove on back to the Seventies with this sequin-covered jam from the New York disco revivalists' upcoming second LP. All the good times and effervescent beats, with none of the creeping stagflation – what more could you want?

7. Jimi Hendrix

"Purple Haze" (live)

In 1970, not long before his death, Hendrix gave his signature tune a fresh spin at an Atlanta festival. Make sure you watch this documentary clip to the end to see his flame-broiled solo.

EXPERT OPINION

Chuck D

With a new Public Enemy album out now, we asked the rebel without a pause to tell us what he thinks of five songs.

CLASSIC

The Rolling Stones
"Honky Tonk Women"
Their performance at Hyde Park in 1969 struck my beat bone. The Charlie Watts fill in the second verse over Mick's vocals is damn near hip-hop! It inspired a rapped interpolation on our new album.

N.W.A
"Fuck tha Police"
Ice T and King Tee got on base about police brutality – then N.W.A hit it in the upper deck.

Isaac Hayes
"Hyperbolicsyllabicsesquedalymistic"
Public Enemy's Bomb Squad used to crowd in a room and play mix-and-mash records. This song had a snatch that stood out. I ran it into the end zone as "Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos."

NEW

Kendrick Lamar
"King Kunta"
I can dig the fact that Kendrick cares less if you can maintain balance as he chops into the listener's head. He fills every space with a lot of nerve.

DJ Snake and Lil Jon
"Turn Down for What"
This is one of those songs where the hook can go on for 15 minutes vamping. James Brown seemed to invent that.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: DESIREE NAVARRO/WIREIMAGE; JESSE RIGGINS; ALLISON WOLFE; DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

FROM KURT SUTTER THE CREATOR OF SONS OF ANARCHY
THE BASTARD EXECUTIONER
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2 jobs.
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PROFILE HOW THE WEEKND BLEW UP PG. 15 | **Q&A** DAN AUERBACH PG. 28

Rock & Roll

ON HIS OWN "Some of this you can't always express with the Stones," says Richards.

KEVIN MAZUR

FALL ALBUM PREVIEW

Keith's New Riff

Inside his first solo album in 23 years By Patrick Doyle

'LOUDER!" SAYS KEITH RICHARDS, raising his index finger as he peers into a sound booth at New York's Electric Lady Studios. Soon, "Crosseyed Heart," a raw Delta-blues stomp, blares from the speakers. The room is filled with the sound of Richards' fingerpicked acoustic guitar and familiar growl as he sings about juggling two lovers at once (opening line: "I love my sugar, but I love my honey too").

Richards, looking stadium-ready in a snakeskin jacket, is holding a listening session for *Crosseyed Heart* (due September 18th), his first solo album since [*Cont. on 14*]

KEITH RICHARDS

[*Cont. from 13*] 1992's *Main Offender*, which was recorded with his band the X-Pensive Winos. *Crosseyed Heart* is a more intimate album: Richards played the majority of the instruments himself, and showed off his musical personalities – including hard-luck rock & roll ("Trouble," "Something for Nothing"), horn-steeped Memphis soul ("Lover's Plea") and gorgeous after-hours ballads ("Just a Gift"). "Some of that you can't always express with the Stones, you know what I mean?" says Richards. "It's another outlet. I mean, I hadn't realized it's been 20-odd years since I've done this. Time flies!"

One highlight is "Illusion," a soulful heartbreak duet with Norah Jones. "She gave me exactly the right feeling we needed," Richards says. "I'm always looking for songs where I can bring a lady in."

Richards started the album around 2011, while the Rolling Stones were on a long break following their *Bigger Bang* tour. Bored, he began scheduling New York studio time with an old friend and collaborator, drummer Steve Jordan. ("We had a blast," Jordan says.) They met sporadically over the next three years, with Richards layering guitars, piano and bass before recruiting "top cats" like former Winos guitarist Waddy Wachtel and pianist Ivan Neville, along with Stones touring alum Bernard Fowler and Blondie Chaplin, to polish the tracks. "It was such a gas to be playing together again," says Wachtel. "It was a party."

The album will be accompanied by a documentary, *Under the Influence*, directed by Morgan Neville and premiering September 18th on Netflix, in which Richards discusses influences, makes pilgrimages to spots like Nashville's Ryman Auditorium and visits Buddy Guy at his club in Chicago. "I started with a premise: If you want to understand Keith, look at the music," says Neville. "In a life full of tumult, it's the one thing that's always been true."

The Stones wrapped the U.S. leg of their Zip Code Tour in July, and Richards says they will tour South America next in February. But he may play live sooner – he's currently weighing whether to hit the road himself with some of the Winos. "Suddenly, I have this extra spread of time," he says. "I'm thinking about it. If I can pull the guys together, I would love to do a couple of shows."

For 15 more albums you need to hear this fall, turn to page 22.

BIGGIE, NIRVANA, ALANIS Halsey onstage in July

BREAKING

Halsey: Rise of a New American Pop Star

A year ago, Halsey was a struggling musician playing small acoustic shows. Then, she posted "Ghost" on SoundCloud. The song – which showed her gift for hazily banging anthems – earned nearly half a million streams within months. Soon, she had a record deal, and now the 20-year-old is blowing up thanks to "New Americana," a dreamy single about a generation "high on legal marijuana/ Raised on Biggie and Nirvana." Here's a guide to the rising star. PAULA MEJIA

Hometown
Washington, New Jersey

Sound
"I write songs about sex and about being sad," says Halsey (born Ashley Nicolette Frangipane). Her debut, *Badlands,* is a booming, synth-y concept record about a wasteland world that looks a lot like America in 2015. "Pop music is in my blood," she says. "But this is not a radio record."

Springsteen-size ambition
In dreaming up the concept for *Badlands,* Halsey imagined "a booming metropolis full of commercialism…where there's a battle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie." (She hadn't yet discovered the 1978 Bruce Springsteen song of the same name.) Immersing herself in this world – down to the look of the people who lived there – she made Badlands a metaphor for her own creativity. "[The metropolis] is my brain, surrounded by a wasteland," she says. "So nobody can get in and I can't leave, either."

Biggie was her Big Bird
When other kids were watching *Sesame Street,* preschool-age Halsey was being exposed to Nineties rock and hip-hop thanks to her young parents (who helped give rise to that highly quotable line from "New Americana"). "I come from a mixed-race family – my dad's black and my mom's white," she said recently. "My dad listened to a ton of old-school rap, and my mom listened to a ton of grunge. I was fortunate that my parents were rocking MTV when I was an infant."

…but Alanis was her role model
Growing up, Halsey played violin, viola and cello until she was 14 and decided "that wasn't cool anymore." Soon, she found an icon whose influence you can hear all over her confessional lyrics. "I thought I was gonna be the next Alanis Morissette," she says of her earliest musical ambitions, "so I bought myself an acoustic guitar."

Geeking out
Halsey cites superhero comic books as a huge influence, though she quickly moved on from Spider-Man to become a fan of Marvel's psychologically complex mutant Deadpool. "He isn't a bad guy, but definitely not a good guy," she says. "I identify with him so much. I don't know if I'm a hero or a villain."

RICH FURY/INVISION/AP IMAGES

PROFILE

Ready for the Weeknd

From broke and homeless in Toronto to the top of the charts: Meet 2015's most unlikely pop superstar

By Simon Vozick-Levinson

THIS IS THE SUMMER OF the Weeknd. Look around, the signs are everywhere: In July, the 25-year-old Canadian singer performed his absurdly catchy hit "Can't Feel My Face" for 83,000 screaming Taylor Swift fans after she brought him out as a surprise guest at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey. In August – by which time "Can't Feel My Face" had shot to Number One on the charts – Stevie Wonder sang a few bars of the song at a concert in New York's Central Park. Earlier this year, Katy Perry said his steamy single "Often" is her favorite song to have sex to. "I don't know if I'm on top of the world," says the Weeknd. "But I'm on top of my game, for sure."

It's past midnight in Brooklyn's Brighton Beach neighborhood, and he's hiding in his trailer on a break from an all-night video shoot. Outside, passersby – some Russian-accented locals, some teenage superfans – crane their necks for a glimpse of him. "It's hard to walk down the street now," he says, fiddling with five or six pairs of sunglasses on a table. "But I worked for that."

"Can't Feel My Face" is one of three Top Five smashes he's scored this year, along with the plush, romantic ballad "Earned It" and the stormy jam "The Hills." "He's one of the biggest artists out right now, and he's just getting going," says Sharon Dastur, senior vice president of programming at radio giant iHeartMedia, which has the Weeknd in rotation at pop and hip-hop stations. "Not a lot of artists hit Number One this quickly and navigate all those formats."

CANADA FLY For his new LP, the Weeknd, 25, worked with Max Martin.

A few years ago, pop domination was the last thing the Weeknd was aiming for. He kept his real name (Abel Tesfaye) and face hidden on his first releases in 2011 – a trio of dark, druggy R&B mixtapes that sounded like they'd been recorded toward the tail end of a *True Detective* orgy. When Republic Records senior vice president Nate Albert flew to Toronto that spring to court the Weeknd and his man- [*Cont. on 16*]

© PETER VAN AGTMAEL/MAGNUM PHOTOS

[*Cont. from 15*] ager, they shut him down. "I thought there was no reason he couldn't end up being a big pop voice," says Albert. "But they had no interest."

After pursuing him for another year and a half, Albert – a rock lifer who played guitar in the Mighty Mighty Bosstones before becoming an A&R exec – was able to persuade the Weeknd to sign with Republic. But the singer's full-length debut, 2013's *Kiss Land*, stuck with the mixtapes' claustrophobic, hazy sound. Even a guest verse from early supporter Drake couldn't get it to register with mainstream audiences. "*Kiss Land* wasn't about what people wanted to hear on the radio," the Weeknd admits now. "It was the state of mind I was in – introverted, like David Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch*." (Albert compares the album to Weezer's *Pinkerton*: "As hard as it was not to have the massive success he probably wanted, I think it galvanized his fan base.")

After *Kiss Land* stalled, the Weeknd fell into a rut. "I just kept getting more and more depressed," he says. He considered relocating from Toronto to Seattle in search of a "super-drugged-out Nirvana vibe." Instead, after writing and scrapping an album's worth of material, he started spending time in L.A. and listening to his label. Republic got him a choice placement on the *50 Shades of Grey* soundtrack with "Earned It" and set up a duet with Ariana Grande on her club-ready single "Love Me Harder," produced by synth-pop wizard Max Martin. The Weeknd and Martin reunited for "Can't Feel My Face," and he cites the Swedish maestro as a major influence on the rest of his new album, *Beauty Behind the Madness*. "At one point, I didn't care," the Weeknd says. "Now I want as many people to hear my music as possible."

Even so, he hasn't completely left his roots behind. On the new LP's "Tell Your Friends," a power ballad co-produced by Kanye West, the Weeknd paints a bleak picture of his misspent youth, singing about being broke and homeless, his nights filled with substance abuse, meaningless sex and petty theft. "As soon as I stepped foot in the city, it was a feeling I got addicted to," says the Weeknd, who moved to downtown Toronto at 17 after being raised by a single mother in the suburbs. "Lights, no sleep – either you're going to make it or die trying."

The Weeknd says he sees no contradiction between that side of his personality and his bright, glossy radio hits. "I feel like I'm changing pop culture," he says. "Taylor Swift's audience can listen to me, but so can the street kids. I want to touch it all."

SOLID ROCK Foals, with Philippakis (front)

BREAKTHROUGH

Foals: Bigger, Badder, Finally Over Here

Brit rockers unleash their sound on 'What Went Down' and plot U.S. invasion

During the sessions for his band's new record in the South of France, Yannis Philippakis – singer-songwriter-guitarist of the English quintet Foals – often passed a building on the outskirts of town where in 1889-90 Vincent Van Gogh was hospitalized after slicing off part of his left ear. It was a good place to contemplate madness – a running theme in the modern-rock turbulence of Foals' fourth album, *What Went Down*. "The songs were almost finished before we went there," Philippakis says. "But some of the place is in there."

"I don't know how America works, but I feel this is our time."

There is certainly "nothing civilized," he admits, about the title track, an echo-laden rush of riffing and vocal psychosis that is harder and darker than anything on Foals' more art-pop LPs – 2008's *Antidotes*, 2010's *Total Life Forever* and 2013's *Holy Fire*, all British Top 10 hits. "I wrote our first record when I was 19 – I was throwing cryptic pictures in the songs," Philippakis recalls. Now 29, he is "preoccupied" with the way technology and the media "afford us a way of looking at ourselves that isn't real. We're so divorced from the savagery within us."

The singer also suggests that Foals – who include drummer Jack Bevan, guitarist Jimmy Smith, bassist Walter Gervers and keyboardist Edwin Congreave – are really "two different beasts. There's the one on earlier records and the one unleashed onstage." The latter "was given more oxygen on this record."

Foals formed in 2005 in Radiohead's hometown, Oxford, where they still write and rehearse in a studio that "stinks, has no daylight" and is so small, Philippakis says, "that all five of us can't fit in there at the same time." Born in Greece, he grew up in Oxford with his brother and South African mother, an anthropologist; his Greek father, an artist, left the family when Yannis was six.

Philippakis dropped out of college in Oxford, where he studied literature, to focus on Foals. But at 12, he began keeping a journal that he still tends to as religiously as possible ("I wrote in it yesterday") and draws from in songs like "Albatross" and "A Knife in the Ocean," on *What Went Down*. "The music is collaborative," he says when asked if Foals are ultimately his band. "But I use it as a vehicle to express things."

Foals have three gold albums at home. But Philippakis believes the band has a U.S.-breakthrough record in *What Went Down*. "I don't pretend to know how America works," he concedes. "But I feel this is our time."

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HOT ACTOR

Becoming Pablo Escobar

How Brazilian actor Wagner Moura turned himself into the most notorious drug lord ever

TWO YEARS AGO, WAGNER Moura was having lunch with his friend José Padilha, when the director popped an unexpected question: "How about playing Pablo Escobar?" Though a well-known Brazilian actor, Moura, 39, wasn't an obvious choice to portray the cocaine kingpin in the American-produced series *Narcos,* which debuted on Netflix on August 28th. For one thing, he'd need to gain 40 pounds, and he didn't speak Spanish.

Moura as Escobar

But Padilha knew the tender and thoughtful Moura could transform himself. He had directed Moura in 2007's *Elite Squad* and its sequel, *Elite Squad: The Enemy Within,* the highest-grossing Brazilian film ever. To play a military police captain, Moura submitted to boot camp with Rio's elite police. "Many actors gave up and said, 'Fuck it, I'm an actor. I don't have to be here,'" Moura says. He stuck it out. When one of the cops threatened his newborn son, Moura gave the aggressive response the camp had cultivated: He punched the guy so hard he broke his nose.

For *Narcos,* Moura gained the weight ("Anyone can gain weight – that's not really acting"), visited the site of Escobar's former ranch (only to find it had been turned into a theme park for kids, "like a Colombian version of Disneyland"), and perfected his Spanish ("in a classroom with Japanese teenagers and German businesspeople"). But he didn't let go of his tenderness. *Narcos* tells one of the past century's grisliest tales, but its strength is the humanity Moura, a recently appointed U.N. Goodwill Ambassador, brings to Escobar – a man who killed thousands of people in his tenure as the head of the Medellín cartel, spent $2,500 a month on the rubber bands used to wrap his money, but also recorded himself reading children's books and smuggled the tapes to his family when he was in hiding.

BIG AT HOME An unknown in America, Moura has been on the cover of Rolling Stone Brazil twice.

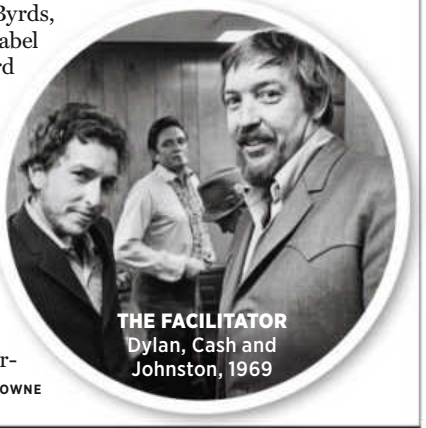
As a teen, Moura watched newsreels of Escobar's death – "I remember a big, fat man on the roof of a house, and bombs in Bogotá" – and felt the pressure of playing someone who figured in living memory. He read "everything that was written about Pablo," and spent time in Barrio Pablo Escobar, the neighborhood that the cartel leader built to house the poor, where many residents still see Escobar as a sort of guerrilla Robin Hood. The result: His performance is a masterpiece of charismatic ambiguity. "Netflix never wanted to make this show about good American cops that go to a third-world country to save poor people from a bad guy," says Moura, whose next project is directing a biopic on Brazilian revolutionary Carlos Marighella. "This concept of [who is] good and who is bad is always being played with." ALEX MORRIS

TRIBUTE

Dylan Producer Bob Johnston, 1932-2015

The Texan helmed 'Highway 61' and a slew of other rock classics

MUSICIANS AS DIverse as Bob Dylan, Aretha Franklin and Jimmy Cliff had one thing in common: producer Bob Johnston, who died of heart failure on August 14th at 83. The Texan logged time as a songwriter and rockabilly artist before he was asked to produce Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* in 1965. The two hit it off ("Working with him was like a drunken joyride," Dylan later wrote), and Johnston wound up helming *Blonde on Blonde*, *John Wesley Harding* and *Nashville Skyline*. "When Dylan wanted to record, he'd always pick up the phone, call me and say, 'I've got some songs,'" Johnston wrote. "I'd go, 'Great, man!'…" As a Columbia staffer, Johnston sometimes produced Dylan during the day and Simon and Garfunkel at night; he also produced Leonard Cohen and the Byrds, and helped persuade the label to let Johnny Cash record at Folsom Prison. After Columbia, Johnston worked with Willie Nelson, and his bond with headstrong musicians never wavered. "It was not a business relationship with Bob," says Cohen. "It was not a creative or artistic relationship. It was a life-or-death friendship." DAVID BROWNE


THE FACILITATOR Dylan, Cash and Johnston, 1969

FROM LEFT: DANIEL DAZA/NETFLIX; MAARTEN DE BOER/GETTY IMAGES; AL CLAYTON/SONY MUSIC ARCHIVES

Low-Profile, Hi-Fi Headphones

On-ear headphones are growing up: Cans with thick enclosures, overemphasized bass and conspicuous logos are fading out, making way for a new class of lighter, more svelte, less showy headphones that have a more balanced sound (and are much less fatiguing to wear all day). Not all of the best new models have cords, either: Recent improvements to Bluetooth technology have brought great sound to wireless models too. **JESSE WILL**

Lightweight Killers

Plantronics Backbeat Sense $180

This wireless set has a clever trick: Take it off, and it instantly pauses your song; put it on again, and the tune resumes. Despite smaller 32mm drivers (other sets on this page use 40mm ones), the sound is immersive, and at less than five ounces, you'll barely feel them.

Luxury Bluetooth

Bowers & Wilkins P5 Wireless $400

The aluminum-and-leather P5 has the build quality of a Bentley and lush sonics to match. Now you can get it cord-free: The wireless uses the aptX codec for better-sounding Bluetooth. And if you still want the fidelity of the wired version, just plug in the included cable.

Big Sound on a Budget

Marshall Major Pitch Black II $119

The amp maker retooled the Major's drivers to expand their range at both the low and high ends while streamlining the earpieces. They blow away most pairs at their price.

Pure Precision

NAD VISO HP30 $229

Canadian company NAD is known for gear that reproduces an accurate, unexaggerated sound; in developing its smallest headphones yet, engineers found a way to elevate bass without suffocating the rest of the sonic spectrum. And this corded set folds up for easy travel.

Cheap Cord-Free Chic

Urbanears Plattan ADV Wireless $99

If bulgy black headphones aren't your style, you can opt for the ADV Wireless in one of 12 colors, each of them logo-free (and most of them subtler than tomato-red). The sound is solid for a sub-$100 wireless set, it can remember the last eight devices paired with it, and the washable headband qualifies it for knock-around daily use.

SUPERCHARGE YOUR IPHONE AUDIO

Let's face it: Plugging a portable headphone amp/DAC into your phone to turn it into an audiophile-grade source is a pretty hardcore move. But not only can the OPPO HA-2 power even the most demanding headphones (with sound that rivals the company's acclaimed CD players and HA-1 desktop amp) while doubling as a backup phone battery, it's slim and sexy-looking, too. And at $299, it's affordable for its category: Portable high-end amp/DAC combos can go for as much as $2,500. **BRIAN HIATT**

FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: PLANTRONICS; MARSHALL HEADPHONES; NAD ELECTRONICS; BOWERS & WILKINS; URBANEARS; OPPO DIGITAL

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15 Albums You Need to Hear This Fall

Lana turns up the heat, Kanye goes back to the drawing board, and more

1 Macklemore & Ryan Lewis
TITLE TBD
DATE TBD

Macklemore and Ryan Lewis' follow-up to their million-selling 2012 debut, *The Heist*, ran into an unexpected delay: At the height of their success, Macklemore – who has been in recovery for drug and alcohol addiction since 2008 – backslid with weed and pills. "I went in and out of sobriety," says the Seattle rapper. "That usually ends up in creative stagnation." It wasn't until October that he was able to give his full attention to making music with producer Lewis. "When I got back into my 12-step meetings, it was like, 'This is no joke,'" Macklemore says. "'Do you want to make another album, or let go of everything you worked for?'"

You can hear their ambition on songs like "Downtown," an improbably epic ode to the moped Macklemore brought along on their last world tour. "It started as a clowning-around thing, but we kept making it bigger," he says of the song, which ranges through old-school hip-hop (complete with vocals from Grandmaster Caz, Melle Mel and Kool Moe Dee), Broadway show tunes and Seventies arena rock. "That one took forever to figure out," says Lewis. Expect some sensitive moments, too, like an emotional ballad with soul singer Leon Bridges and the already-released Ed Sheeran collaboration "Growing Up," which Macklemore wrote for his now-two-month-old daughter. "Ryan really pushed me to get more vulnerable and come to grips with how scared I was to be a dad," he says. "I'm still trying to figure out who I am."

"It was like, 'Do you want to make another album, or let go of everything you worked for?'"
—Macklemore

Del Rey

2 Lana Del Rey
Honeymoon
SEPTEMBER 18TH

2014's *Ultraviolence*, produced mostly by the Black Keys' Dan Auerbach, won strong reviews with its rock-tinged sound, but it failed to generate major hits. This time around, there are signs that Del Rey has her eyes back on the charts: Rick Nowels – who produced several songs on 2010's radio-friendly *Born to Die* – is producing and co-writing most of *Honeymoon*, and Del Rey's new single "High by the Beach" is a woozy party anthem whose spare, hook-y sound plays to her early strengths. The LP's title track, meanwhile, backs up her recent promise to deliver "majestic choruses [and] beautiful orchestrations." Del Rey might have more surprising sounds in store, too: "I'm ready to go into more of a 'Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds' surrealist place," she recently said.

FROM TOP: © SPLASH NEWS/CORBIS; BRAD WAKEFIELD/REX SHUTTERSTOCK

3 Adele
Title TBD
DATE TBD

Adele

Adele's follow-up to 2011's 11 million-selling blockbuster, *21*, is one of the music industry's most closely guarded secrets. Here's what we know so far: She's put in studio time with veteran pop songwriter Diane Warren, but she has not returned to work with Rick Rubin, who parted ways with her after producing roughly half of the songs on *21*. She has, however, reportedly recorded new tracks with past collaborators Paul Epworth ("Rolling in the Deep") and OneRepublic's Ryan Tedder ("Rumour Has It"). The album may also reportedly include first-time contributions from producers and songwriters including Pharrell Williams, Danger Mouse and Blur's Damon Albarn.

West

4 Kanye West
SWISH
DATE TBD

After a flurry of activity early this year, West has stepped back from the summer release that was rumored for his seventh studio LP. So what's up with the year's most anticipated rap album? He's said he's working "slowly, to make it an art project." The tracks he made with Paul McCartney (including early singles "Only One" and "All Day") and the Sia collaboration "Wolves" might not make the cut. West has also reportedly been working with Bruno Mars.

5 Don Henley
Cass County
SEPTEMBER 25TH

Henley recorded his first solo LP in 15 years in Nashville and Dallas with country greats like Merle Haggard, Dolly Parton and Miranda Lambert – but don't call it a country album. "It's pretty eclectic," Henley says. "It's not all that consistent in terms of labels and genres. Some of it's neotraditional country. There's a couple of blues songs on there. There's some things that might be called Americana." The constants are Henley's voice and songwriting. "The record company prefers to call it a Don Henley record and refuses to put it in any particular category," he adds. "I think that's wise. People can decide for themselves."

6 Grimes
Title TBD
OCTOBER TBD

2012's breakthrough *Visions* made fans out of Katy Perry, Lorde and Rihanna. Now Claire Boucher – the idiosyncratic, pink-haired Canadian artist who records as Grimes – is ready to be a pop star in her own right. Boucher, who produced her latest album herself at her new L.A. home studio, says the songs on the LP are split into three groups: "aggressive bangers" with a rock edge (see "Flesh Without Blood," about a false friend); "weirder, more experimental things"; and "really, really poppy songs, like almost rococo pop." She describes the album's creation as a spiritual process. "I'm not explicitly religious, but overall I think this album is about God," Boucher says. "I mean that abstractly. Being creative can be really elusive, and I feel like the thing that happens when it does come is maybe what God is supposed to be."

Henley

7 Rod Stewart
Another Country
OCTOBER 23RD

Stewart ended his two-decade songwriting drought with 2013's *Time*. Now he's on a roll, with another collection of all-new tunes that he penned himself. "I was born in London, so I'm a cockney Scotsman," he says. "There's a huge Gaelic feel throughout the album, lots of violins and mandolins." On the upcoming single "Love Is," he tries to work out the truth about romance after three divorces. "This is me passing along, to anyone who will listen, a few nuggets of wisdom acquired from my dippings into life's chocolate box down the years," he says. "Believe me, though, I still don't understand the chemistry of love and why sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't."

Stewart

8 Disclosure
Caracal
SEPTEMBER 25TH

After their triple-platinum 2013 single, "Latch," featuring Sam Smith, English brothers Guy and Howard Lawrence aren't just one of the hottest acts in EDM – they're major-league pop contenders, too. For their second album, they doubled down on sleek beats and killer hooks, booking in-person songwriting sessions with A-list vocal guests like the Weeknd, Miguel and Lorde (whose turn on the ultra-cool, supercatchy "Magnets" is an album highlight). "The song-

FROM TOP: KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES; JASON SQUIRES/WIREIMAGE; PRINCE WILLIAMS/WIREIMAGE; JOHN SHEARER/INVISION/AP IMAGES

writing is the most important thing for us," says Howard. "I feel a lot of dance acts lack the cohesiveness that we can get." They explore this theme on "Jaded," a song featuring Howard on lead vocals that takes aim at what they say is a rising plague of ghostwriters and EDM poseurs. "You meet more and more producers and you find out, 'You're not really a producer, are you? You're just a monster A&R who puts his name on the record,'" Guy says. "It's weird."

Cornell

9 Chris Cornell
Higher Truth
SEPTEMBER 18TH

Six years after releasing *Scream*, his widely panned collaboration with hip-hop producer Timbaland, Cornell has created a stripped-down album of acoustic songs inspired by Bruce Springsteen's *Nebraska* and Nick Drake's *Pink Moon*. The Soundgarden frontman recruited producer Brendan O'Brien – who's worked extensively with Pearl Jam and Springsteen, and engineered Soundgarden's 1994 classic *Superunknown* – to help him make *Higher Truth*. The two rock veterans played nearly every instrument themselves, and many of the tracks, including "Worried Moon" and "Nearly Forgot My Broken Heart," are infused with no small degree of sorrow. "That's not unusual for me," says Cornell. "With an acoustic song, there needs to be something melancholy or introspective about it to get me through the door."

10 Kurt Vile
B'lieve I'm Goin Down
SEPTEMBER 25TH

Shaggy Philadelphia indie rocker Vile says that his sixth solo album started out as "a psychedelic folk affair." It ended up becoming all that and more, with dreamlike guitar and piano arrangements backing Vile's most introspective lyrics yet. He says he hit a songwriting breakthrough on a trip to the California desert, where he penned the lonesome highlight "Wheelhouse" ("Sometimes I talk too much/ But I gotta get it out"). On the chiming lead single, "Pretty Pimpin," Vile spins a trippy story about being so tired that he looks in the mirror and sees a stranger rocking a sweet outfit. "That's based on a true story," Vile says with a laugh. "I was just mentally exhausted. I think most people feel like that at times."

11 David Gilmour
Rattle That Lock
SEPTEMBER 18TH

Fans of the Pink Floyd guitarist's solo work will find much to love in the warm, flowing sounds of his first release in nine years. Lyrically, it's organized around one man's stream of consciousness over the course of a single day. "There are moments of encouraging people to protest against injustices," says Gilmour. "And there are personal moments." One of those is "A Boat Lies Waiting," a tribute to Floyd keyboardist Richard Wright, who passed away in 2008. "Dancing Right In Front of Me," meanwhile, was inspired by Gilmour's experiences as a father. "A lot of young people have been through experiences that have traumatized them," he says. "I'm not sure we're moving forward in terms of humanity and kindness very much yet. We live and hope."

Bieber

Gilmour

12 Justin Bieber
Title TBD
NOVEMBER TBD

"Where Are Ü Now," Bieber's hit collaboration with Diplo and Skrillex's EDM superduo Jack Ü, has single-handedly restored the pop star's cool after years of embarrassing press. "A lot of people lost faith in Justin Bieber," says Skrillex. "But I always thought he was one of the best singers in the world." Jack Ü returned to produce several songs slated for possible inclusion on Bieber's first full-length album since 2012, which may also feature reported contributions from Kanye West and Rick Rubin. "If anybody gets to see Justin in the studio, they're going to be blown away," Skrillex adds. "He gets on any instrument, and he'll school you in it – then he'll go skateboard and school you in that."

Coldplay's Martin

13 Coldplay
A Head Full of Dreams
DATE TBD

After last year's introspective *Ghost Stories*, which reflected frontman Chris Martin's separation from wife Gwyneth Paltrow, Martin has said Coldplay are seeking "something colorful and uplifting" for their seventh LP. "It's hard to perfect

FROM TOP: GILBERT CARRASQUILLO/GC IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES; SUZI PRATT/FILMMAGIC; BRIAN RASIC/GETTY IMAGES; XAVIER COLLIN/IMAGE PRESS/SPLASH NEWS

a happy song," he confessed recently. "Pharrell managed it. Stevie Wonder managed it. Bill Withers managed it. I haven't managed it yet." The band has been holed up in London with Norwegian production duo Stargate, who've produced hits for Rihanna, Beyoncé and Katy Perry (and Coldplay's 2014 one-off "Miracles"). Adding to the mystery, Martin has said *A Head Full of Dreams* could be their finale. "It's like the last *Harry Potter* book or something," he said recently. "Not to say that there might not be another thing one day, but this is the completion of something."

14 Ellie Goulding
Title TBD
NOVEMBER TBD

Smash singles like 2011's "Lights" and 2012's "Anything Can Happen" have positioned Goulding as a left-field pop force. This year, she's building on that breakthrough with an album of tunes aimed directly at the charts, featuring production from Top 40 heavyweights including Max Martin. "I want to hear my records on the radio," Goulding says. The common thread through it all are her bright, airy vocals. "My voice is the one thing that no one else is going to have," she says.

Goulding

15 YG
Still Krazy
DATE TBD

YG's first album, *My Krazy Life,* was one of the strongest rap LPs of 2014, and one of the best straight-up West Coast gangsta rap releases in years. Stakes for his follow-up got even higher when an unknown assailant shot the Compton rapper three times outside a Los Angeles studio where he was recording in June. Luckily, the injuries to his hip weren't life-threatening – and within days, he was back in the vocal booth, recording a song about the incident, which remains unsolved. "When I'm outside the studio, there's some paranoia," YG says. "But when I'm in the studio, it just adds to my creativity. I'm going to capitalize off all that shit!" He estimates he's about halfway done with *Still Krazy,* whose bass-heavy G-funk sound – from producers including Kendrick Lamar collaborator Terrace Martin – often makes it feel like an alternate-universe sequel to *The Chronic.* "I just want to make something that's going to stick around for 10 or 15 years," YG says. "Classic shit, that's what I'm fucking with."

CONTRIBUTORS: *David Browne, Andy Greene, Annie Licata, Rachel Syme, Simon Vozick-Levinson*

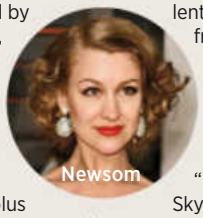
Best of the Rest

Darlene Love
Introducing Darlene Love SEPTEMBER 18TH

The pop belter's new album, produced by Steve Van Zandt, features two songs by Bruce Springsteen ("Night Closing In" and "Just Another Lonely Mile") – plus contributions from Elvis Costello and more.

Duran Duran
Paper Gods SEPTEMBER 18TH

"The schizophrenia's getting worse," keyboardist Nick Rhodes says. Old pals Mark Ronson and Nile Rodgers produced the pop survivors' 14th full-length LP; Janelle Monae, Lindsay Lohan and reclusive ex-Chili Peppers guitarist John Frusciante all guest. "It is quite risqué, isn't it?" says singer Simon Le Bon. "But it seems so normal to us."


Newsom

Ought
Sun Coming Down SEPTEMBER 18TH

Just a year after the Montreal crew's excellent debut found fresh thrills in classic post-punk sounds, they're back. The trance-like build of "Beautiful Blue Sky" is already a live favorite.

Dave and Phil Alvin
Lost Time
SEPTEMBER 18TH

Roots and rockabilly fans cheered these brothers' 2014 return – as did the Recording Academy, which gave them a Grammy. Their new one features covers of James Brown ("Please Please Please") and Lead Belly.

Le Bon

New Order
Music Complete
SEPTEMBER 25TH

Eight years after founding bassist Peter Hook split, the English act's remaining members are forging on with vocal help from Iggy Pop and Brandon Flowers. Singer Bernard Sumner has promised "an orchestral feel" on some tracks.

Eagles of Death Metal
Zipper Down
OCTOBER 2ND

Josh Homme (who moonlights as this band's drummer) has described the new one as "an eargasm trapped inside a crazer-beam."

Wavves
V
OCTOBER 2ND

Frontman Nathan Williams has complained on Twitter about lack of label support for his grunge-y band's fifth album: "You don't scare me," he tweeted at Warner Bros. Records. "I'm not scared of getting dropped." Even so, the LP is coming out on time this fall.

Coheed and Cambria
The Color Before the Sun OCTOBER 9TH

These guys are known for their ambitious concept LPs, but their latest is a set of unrelated songs about subjects, including fatherhood.

Selena Gomez
Revival OCTOBER 9TH

Gomez has said that writing songs for her latest LP pushed her "out of my comfort zone." It's working: Her uncharacteristically moody single "Good for You" made the Top 10.

Deerhunter
Fading Frontier
OCTOBER 16TH

Work on the Atlanta psych-rock crew's latest was delayed when singer Bradford Cox suffered a serious car accident in December. He's back in action on a set with echoes of Bowie and Seventies AM radio.

Joanna Newsom
Divers OCTOBER 23RD

It's been five years since Newsom's triple LP *Have One on Me.* This one's just one disc. Lead single "Sapokanikan" is a paradoxically hook-y tune that's teeming with historical allusions.

Homme

Janet Jackson
Title TBD DATE TBD

"No Sleeep," a quiet-storm jam featuring rapper J. Cole that Jackson recently released, is a sign of where she's heading on her first album since 2008's *Discipline.*

FROM TOP: XPOSURE/AKM-GSI; PASCAL LE SEGRETAIN/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID WOLFF-PATRICK/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES; DANA (DISTORTION) YAVIN

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Dan Auerbach

The Black Keys frontman on record geeks, his new band the Arcs, and why he hates cats

By Simon Vozick-Levinson

In the past few years, whenever he hasn't been busy selling out arenas with Black Keys drummer Patrick Carney, Dan Auerbach has booked informal jam sessions with a loose group of friends including Menahan Street Band saxophonist Leon Michels. "These guys are my oldest musical buddies besides Pat," says the singer-guitarist. "We just record shit for fun and sock it away." This year, Auerbach and Michels combed through those tracks to assemble *Yours, Dreamily*, the debut of the band they dubbed the Arcs. Auerbach, 36, says he's looking forward to their first tour this fall: "With these guys, we can try absolutely anything."

The Arcs album sounds like some lost psychedelic LP that you might find buried in a used-records bin. Are you a big crate-digger?

That's really what we are: record nerds. The last real job I had was at a record store, Quonset Hut in Akron, Ohio. I had graduated high school and completely immersed myself in blues music, but I was exposed to things there that I never would have heard otherwise. I remember this Frank Black and the Catholics album that I loved. We also sold a lot of Deadhead merchandise.

Did this album let you tap into your own Deadhead side?

Yeah, definitely. The Arcs scratch that itch for me – and when we play live, it's going to be magnified. These guys are so crazy-capable. We all got together and played recently, and it was so fucking exciting. There was a lot of improvisation.

The Black Keys are one of the last big rock & roll bands left. How do you like being the keepers of that flame?

When we tell people that we can't believe we're headlining Coachella or whatever, we mean it. We are not the people that you would normally associate with being at the top of a pop food chain – generally, to do that, you've got to have some star charisma.

You had to cancel some Keys dates recently when Pat hurt his shoulder. Is he better now?

He's doing great. We played some shows, and he hasn't had any pain the next morning or anything. He can't raise his arm above a certain level, but he doesn't actually need to, the way he plays.

Speaking of injuries, you probably saw the throne Dave Grohl had built so he could play with a broken leg. On a frontman-to-frontman level, are you jealous of Dave's throne?

No! He deserves it. I don't need to see a rock star running all over the goddamn stage. My idea of cool is Hound Dog Taylor, and he always played sitting down.

How do you keep life on the road fun when you've toured as much as you have?

You don't. It's like *Groundhog Day*. Every arena backstage looks exactly the same.

I heard that you're into boxing. Do you spar backstage on tour?

I brought a punching bag, boxing gloves and my jump-rope, and I try to work out. But not before shows. It's not like I get pumped up like I'm a WWF wrestler – like, oil my body and do a bunch of pushups before I run onstage.

Bob Dylan likes boxing too. Who would win if you and he got in the ring?

I would win [*laughs*]. But if we got in the songwriting ring, he would win.

What are you listening to these days?

I'm into Vince Staples. And I love Future's new album. It's tough as nails.

On one Arcs song, you sing, "Man's best friend will bite you in the end." I take it you're not a dog person?

No, fuck, I love dogs! It's man that I don't like. I hate cats, though – mostly because all the awful girlfriends I ever had were into cats.

KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES

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"If money is speech, you don't want a guy who's got $10 billion of talk." —Stephen Colbert on Donald Trump

Random Notes

Steven Tyler found other company at an L.A. club gig for Rod Stewart's daughter.

Rock's Most Dangerous Duo

Minutes before calling Rosie O'Donnell a "fat pig" in front of 24 million people at the first Republican presidential debate in Cleveland, Donald Trump caught up with self-proclaimed "old-school Republican" Joe Perry, who was in town for an Aerosmith concert. "He's always telling me how much fun it must be to be a rock star and have all the supermodels," Perry says. "It came as a shock to him that I have been monogamous for 30 years!"

THE OZZMAN SWIMETH Ozzy Osbourne frolicked in Hawaii with wife Sharon, then jetted to a one-off gig in Mexico.

LONG MAY YOU WASH Neil Young – who's hitting the road again in the fall with the Nelson brothers – kept his electric car looking spiffy in Malibu.

FAST LIVIN' Buddies Jake Gyllenhaal and Marcus Mumford (from left) spent the day at Disneyland in Anaheim, hitting Space Mountain and the Matterhorn Bobsleds.

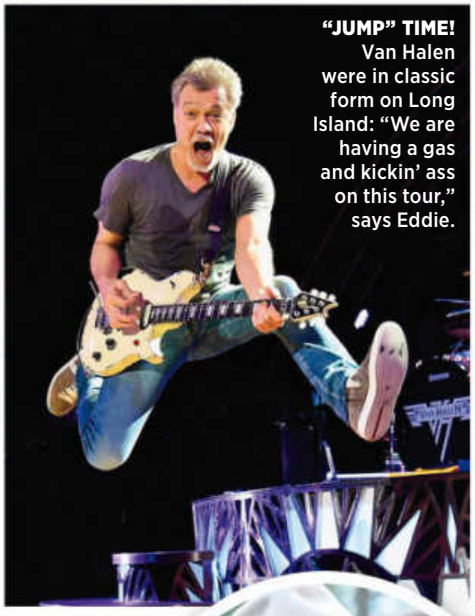
Taylor's New Folk Squad

Taylor Swift called Julia Roberts (right) and Joan Baez onstage at the pop superstar's concert at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California. "She was a joy," says the 74-year-old Baez, who shimmied along to "Style," wearing a Swift T-shirt. "Sweet, kind, respectful. She knows how much she influences young people, and she doesn't take that role lightly."

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ZACK WHITFORD, 2: SPLASH NEWS; TAYLOR SWIFT/INSTAGRAM; SHARPSHOOTER IMAGES/SPLASH NEWS; FK-ROL/X17ONLINE.COM

FLEA'S BEES The Chili Peppers bassist has a new hobby: his "beautiful little bees," 200,000 of which he keeps in his backyard.

BITCH BETTER HAVE MY MONKEY Rihanna made friends with a baby monkey on her latest trip to her native Barbados. (She also partied on a yacht with her rumored new boyfriend, Formula 1 race car driver Lewis Hamilton.) In late September, she'll be starting as an adviser on *The Voice*.



"JUMP" TIME! Van Halen were in classic form on Long Island: "We are having a gas and kickin' ass on this tour," says Eddie.

PALE EMPERORS Tourmates Billy Corgan and Marilyn Manson made a scene at a SiriusXM event in Chicago. Why the nun outfit? "Easiest answer would be to say, 'Nun comment,'" says Manson.

D'Angelo wrapped up Outside Lands first night with his monster 10-piece soul band.

HELLBENT FOR LEATHER St. Vincent gave a shout-out to the "freaks, queers and dominatrixes" at San Francisco's Outside Lands festival – and covered a snippet of Depeche Mode's "Personal Jesus."

Sheryl Makes Nashville Happy

Sheryl Crow helped Rolling Stone and Patrón celebrate RS Country's one-year anniversary at an intimate Nashville gig. "If I can walk into a room and connect with even five or 10 people, to me that's better than playing for 100,000," says Crow. Sounds good to us!

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: PRIMADONNA/GEMAIRA/SPLASH NEWS; FLEA/INSTAGRAM; TIMOTHY HIATT/GETTY IMAGES FOR SIRIUSXM; JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC; JOSEPH LLANES; KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES FOR SOLTERS

How to Get L.A. Noir Right

Unlike 'True Detective,' 'Ray Donovan' has gotten better each season

By Rob Sheffield

Ray Donovan
Sundays, 9 p.m., Showtime

WE'VE HIT THE AFTERMATH of the Golden Age dramas: *The Sopranos, The Wire, Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad* are all gone, and the stakes have changed. These days it's not about supernova legends blasting out of the sky; it's about hardworking journeymen getting the job done. That's why *Ray Donovan*, strange as it seems, is the model for how a cable drama can develop now, building slowly and tweaking the chemistry until it achieves greatness.

Liev Schreiber is the L.A.-via-Boston operator, doing freelance dirty work for his shady clients – sometimes quasi-criminal, sometimes not so quasi. He and his wife (Paula Malcolmson) fight in their over-the-top Boston-Irish accents. Although he took her out West to start a new life, his low-life family has caught up with him – like Jon Voight as his sleazebag dad, Mickey, a Southie gangster just out of the clink. Schreiber has the slow-burn stoic look of a small-time hood desperate to stay in the big leagues. When a client asks the eternal question that L.A. private eyes have faced since the days of Philip Marlowe and Lew Archer – "Mr. Donovan, exactly what do you do?" – he replies, "I change the story."

Ray Donovan has changed its story too. When it started out on Showtime in 2013, it was a clumsy mess nobody took seriously. Schreiber just looked like your basic premium-cable Tough Guy With Problems: a guy who sweats a lot, punches people, hates his dad, grunts at his wife, suffers Catholic guilt, the usual. But after a couple of apprentice seasons, retooling and shifting showrunners, *Ray Donovan* has turned the corner. It has trimmed away the pretensions (like the priest-molestation back story, which aimed way too hard for moral and emotional significance it couldn't possibly handle). The third season is twice as good as the second, which was twice as good as the first.

THE FIXER
Schreiber's Ray Donovan

It's turned into what *True Detective 2.0* wanted so desperately to be: an L.A. noir with all these elements of non-L.A. weirdness thrown in. Everybody here seems to have just wandered in from some other town. The Boston-Irish characters hold on to their accents so they don't have to admit they're trapped at the edge of the world. From the big-money clients to the hoods they hire, it's developed a SoCal ambience that's totally convincing because it's full of people who wish they were anywhere else.

The MVP this season is Ian McShane (Al Swearengen from *Deadwood*), as a posh criminal tycoon with a dangerous daughter – the long-lost Katie Holmes. McShane loves to swagger through a scene, announcing, "Los Angeles – someone once said it's like a volcano spewing out wreckage in all directions!" McShane overdoes it a bit, but that matches perfectly with Schreiber, who is pretty much the definition of "underdoing it." Maybe the big reveal next season will be his long-awaited second facial expression.

As Ray's dad, Voight has settled into his dirty-old-grandpa role. When grandson Conor worries why his mom ran off back to Boston, Voight says, "Maybe she went back to see that cocksucker father of hers. Or enjoy the fall foliage." When the kid frets about whether she left because she walked in on him masturbating, Voight assures him it's no big deal: "If God didn't want us to jerk off, he would have given us shorter arms." Preach, Gramps.

True Detective failed because it was trying to play by the old rules – it wanted to be a mythic Golden Age masterpiece so much that it jumped right into all the purple poetry, without bothering to master the scene-by-scene mechanics of an ordinary cop show. It aspired to be great, without putting in the work of getting good. It was the last gap of the old system, while *Ray Donovan* is a sign of the new, for better or worse. Like Ray himself, it's changing the story.

SHORT TAKE

More 'Wire,' Less 'Crash'

Show Me a Hero
Sundays, 8 p.m., HBO

The most David Simon type of story imaginable – a six-hour miniseries about the fight over public housing in Yonkers, New York, in the 1980s. Only Simon could turn such a grim premise into HBO gold. Like *The Wire* or *Treme*, *Show Me a Hero* is a sprawling portrait of a city on the skids, full of racial tension and systematic corruption. Oscar Isaac is superbly Pacino-esque as a real-life politician who wins an upset victory and becomes the youngest mayor in America – but, of course, that's where his troubles really begin. Paul Haggis directed, though fortunately *Show Me a Hero* is less like his *Crash* and more like Simon's *The Wire*. The Bruce Springsteen soundtrack sets the tone – *Show Me a Hero* is the age-old debate over what America is, captured in the petty squabbles of one ordinary city. And Isaac's tragic Eighties Oates-stache is the TV facial hair of the year. **R.S.**

Isaac gets lost in Yonkers.

FROM TOP: MICHAEL DESMOND/SHOWTIME; PAUL SCHIRALDI/HBO

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The Rise & Fall of a Bitcoin Kingpin

How a bullied geek forged an empire out of digital currency, and became a suspect in a half-billion-dollar heist

By David Kushner

JUST AFTER SUNRISE ON AUGUST 1ST, TOKYO POLICE stormed into a sleek two-story townhouse on a quiet residential street in Japan's capital and arrested Mark Karpeles, the 30-year-old head of Mt. Gox, the largest bitcoin exchange in the world. By the time they led the doughy, pale Frenchman away, the police could barely make their way through the throngs of reporters closing in outside. ¶ Just three months earlier, when I met Karpeles here, the scene was considerably calmer. He was baking apple quiche, a recipe passed down from his grandmother. Scruffy and chipper, his dark hair pulled back in a loose ponytail, he wore baggy green pants and a flour-dusted black T-shirt with the words THIS ISN'T EVEN MY FINAL FORM. System of a Down played from his radio. Apples and bread crumbs covered the living-room table he otherwise used for his model train set.

Karpeles was the accidental emperor of bitcoin, a hapless geek who, as much to his own surprise as others', became the most powerful lord of digital cash. During his reign, bitcoin, the leading form of virtual currency, rose in value from approximately a quarter to more than $1,200. *The Wall Street Journal* estimated that at one point Mt. Gox was processing 80 percent of all bitcoin transactions in the world. At its peak, the company traded more than $4 million a month. Tyler Winklevoss – one of the famed twins who sued Mark Zuckerberg over the founding of Facebook for a $65 million settlement and is among the bullish investors in digital money – says Mt. Gox was "the most important and prominent property in bitcoin."

But in February 2014, it was discovered that a half-billion dollars worth of bitcoins simply vanished from Karpeles' exchange, leaving customers around the world unable to withdraw their funds. It's the largest online heist in history. (Estimates vary on the exact amount. Many have reported $450 million; Karpeles says it could be as high as $650 million.) Some – including even those who worked closely with Karpeles – suspected it was an inside job. "We had an ongoing joke: 'Take pizza to Mark when he's in jail,'" Ashley Barr, the first employee at Mt. Gox, tells me. "We always assumed that was where he'd end up."

The Japanese police arrested Karpeles for allegedly padding his digital accounts with $1 million worth of fake bitcoins and fleecing another $8.9 million from Mt. Gox customer deposits. He's still being investigated for what, if any, role he had in the disappearance of the half-billion in bitcoins.

Karpeles, over several months of interviews, denied culpability. "A lot of people seem to think that someone at Mt. Gox was evil," he says. "I know that I didn't steal anything. I mean, if I had, like, $650 million in bitcoin, or even a fraction of this, I wouldn't be here."

KARPELES NEVER EXPECTED to be at the center of a financial revolution. Growing up in Burgundy and Paris, the melancholic only child of a single mother (he never knew his father), Karpeles escaped into the world on the other side of his computer screen. His mother, Anne, a science teacher and amateur coder, wrote a musical keyboard for him to play on his Sinclair computer. "I created small game programs for him, and he liked it," his mother e-mailed me in French. "A lot."

By 10, Karpeles had started teaching himself to code by taking apart his grandmother's alarm system. While other kids dreamed of being rock stars or athletes, Karpeles dreamed of finding fame through coding. "I wanted the software I write to be useful enough for everyone to want to use it," he says.

At a young age, he was sent to a Catholic boarding school in the Champagne valley. But, socially awkward and geeky, he was bullied by his classmates and ostracized at school. "It was not so easy to adapt," he tells me one afternoon, as he browses manga in a Tokyo bookshop. Karpeles spent his days devouring Japanese comics and scribbling code in a notebook, since he didn't have access to a PC.

After finishing middle school, he put his skills into practice when he moved to Paris with his mother, and began, in his early teens, hacking into shopping sites so

VIRTUAL MOGUL Karpeles announcing that his bitcoin-exchange company was filing for bankruptcy in 2014. This summer, Japanese police arrested him for allegedly padding his accounts with fake bitcoins.

"THE ASAHI SHIMBUN"/GETTY IMAGES, DIGITALLY ALTERED BY SEAN MCCABE

he could get anything he wanted for free. (When I ask how he did it, he smiles and says, "It's probably not a good idea for me to tell you.") Karpeles savored his newfound power. Stealing Gameboys and mobile phones for his classmates, he learned, was a way to make friends. "A lot of people respected me for that," he recalls. "I did feel more important, in a way. If I need something, I press a button and I get it."

Karpeles' scam ran for two years, so long that his initial fear of getting caught faded. "After a while, you see nothing happening, so you forget about it," he says. Forget about it, that is, until the police showed up and carted the teenager off to jail. As a minor, he got away with only probation, but the experience marked the beginning of years of adolescent turmoil. To his mother's despair, he ran away and attempted to live on the streets of Paris for a week. Through his teens and early twenties, he sank into a suicidal depression; at his lowest point, he made a noose out of a computer cable ("It was the only thing I had around," he tells me with a shrug), though he never brought himself to use it.

In 2009, he moved to Japan, a country he'd been fascinated by since getting hooked on anime as a boy. Despite being a *gaijin,* or foreigner, he felt at home for the first time in his life, quickly learning the language and launching his own Web hosting company. He was first introduced to bitcoin when a customer in Peru told Karpeles he was having trouble getting a credit card and asked if he could pay with bitcoins instead.

Bitcoin was created in 2009 by a mysterious coder (or group of coders) under the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto as a radical new payment system: decentralized, unregulated and, for the most part, anonymous. Though it has real value (with a current exchange rate of around $250), bitcoin exists electronically. There's no paper, no coins, no bank to charge transaction fees or government to control the flow. Intrigued, Karpeles became an early adopter of the currency. He found purpose and community among bitcoin faithful such as Jed McCaleb, a young American who'd recently launched his own bitcoin exchange, Mt. Gox.

"People think someone at Mt. Gox was evil," says Karpeles. "I didn't steal anything. If I had $650 million in bitcoin – or even a fraction of that – I wouldn't be here."

Mt. Gox was originally a site McCaleb had made for people to exchange Magic cards (thus the name – Magic: the Gathering Online Exchange, or Mt. Gox for short). But by July 2010, he'd devoted it to bitcoin instead, setting it up as the currency's first online brokerage: processing purchases and holding customers' money. By taking a small commission on trades, Mt. Gox was set to bring in $100,000 its first year, Karpeles says. But there were setbacks, like when a hacker stole $45,000 worth of virtual currency. By March 2011, McCaleb wanted out.

According to Karpeles, McCaleb, who he'd become familiar with online, asked him if he'd want to take over Mt. Gox. All he asked for in return was a 50-50 split of the profits for the first six months, and a 12 percent stake in the future. "I basically got it for free," Karpeles recalls. (McCaleb declined to comment.) At the time, with only about 1,000 people using the exchange, Karpeles hardly expected to get more than ramen money. But he figured it would be "a new adventure."

It didn't take long for Karpeles' new adventure to take an unexpected turn. On June 6th, 2011, just three months after he took over Mt. Gox, Sens. Chuck Schumer and Joe Manchin wrote to Attorney General Eric Holder and Drug Enforcement Agency administrator Michele Leonhart, urging them to shut down Silk Road, an online black market predominantly used for drugs. It wasn't just the site that was a concern, but the new economy making it possible. "The only method of payment for these illegal purchases is an untraceable peer-to-peer currency known as bitcoins," the senators wrote.

Hoping to stay out of the fray, Karpeles wrote to the DEA, offering to comply with

any investigation. "Ultimately, we are pursuing a goal of accepted legitimacy, both for bitcoin and our exchange," he wrote. To protect against drug dealers laundering money on the site, Mt. Gox began to track suspicious transactions, especially anyone moving large sums. All the news about Silk Road, however, proved good for business. With growing exposure, the price of bitcoin hit a new peak of $30. In less than two months, according to Karpeles, Mt. Gox had grown from 1,000 customers to 65,000.

But Karpeles' burgeoning empire would soon take a massive hit. On June 18th, someone claimed to have hacked into the Mt. Gox computers and was putting its files up for sale. Customers began to notice bitcoins mysteriously disappearing from their accounts. Karpeles took to Twitter and Reddit to reassure the nervous bitcoiners that, in fact, the problems affected only a handful of users. "Trust me," he wrote, "if we had a problem in Mt. Gox and it was actively exploited, we'd have way more than a dozen compromised accounts."

Yet the next night, Karpeles awoke to an urgent call. The price of bitcoin was crashing. Around 2 a.m., he discovered a hacker was cashing out thousands of bitcoins, and thus plummeting the price from $17 per bitcoin to less than a penny. "Someone's cashing out the motherlode on mtgox!" one person posted on the forums. Karpeles quickly moved $7 million in bitcoins on the site to another server and temporarily shut down Mt. Gox before more damage could be done.

THE THEFT AND ITS FALLOUT
Karpeles (top) taught himself to code at 10, soon hacking into shopping sites and getting arrested before moving abroad. Above: A bitcoin investor at Mt. Gox, 2014.

These were just the first of many warning signs Karpeles seemed to ignore. Behind the scenes, people were growing concerned over his role in the nascent bitcoin economy. Chief among them was Roger Ver, the so-called "Bitcoin Jesus" who was also living in Tokyo at the time. A wiry libertarian from Silicon Valley, Ver had renounced his U.S. citizenship after getting arrested for flipping fireworks on eBay and serving 10 months in prison. Ver, who made millions selling computer hardware online, saw bitcoin as a way to subvert the government he'd grown to despise.

"A real clear milestone is when governments no longer control money," Ver tells me one night at a Tokyo steakhouse, one of the many in town that accept bitcoins. "If the world's using bitcoin," he believes, "governments won't be able to fund wars through inflation like they do today."

Ver bought up what's now worth millions in bitcoins, and he committed himself to spreading the word – after moving to Japan, he was the first to lend a hand to Mt. Gox in the wake of the hacking attack, desperate to keep the currency viable and attractive. But he grew dismayed over what he saw as Karpeles' strange sense of remove. "He has no work ethic," says Ver, who had to deal with panicked customers during the crisis while Karpeles went home. (Karpeles says he left because he "couldn't work on the code with everyone around.")

Still, the company, and currency, survived the early hacks and continued to boom. Karpeles expanded to dozens of employees and moved to Google's former office building in Tokyo. Despite his tendency to be, as his mother puts it, "withdrawn," it seemed to some that the success was going to his head. "I had to talk him out of buying a Lamborghini," says co-worker Barr. "I always felt Mark was trying to prove something – like, from childhood he was told he wouldn't amount to much. One time at his computer he said, 'I wish my old teachers could see me now.' He wanted to be the head of something big."

For Mt. Gox, one of the biggest breaks came from the "Winklevi." The twins had been vacationing on the Spanish island of Ibiza when they heard about bitcoin. The two had just begun spending their Facebook settlement by investing in various startups, and they were looking for the next big thing.

"Bitcoin and digital currency is just this thing that was always going to happen," Tyler Winklevoss says. The Winklevi bet big, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on bitcoin. And there was only one place to buy it in bulk, they realized: this company run by an elusive Frenchman in Tokyo, Mt. Gox. Still, the Winklevi were aware of the risks of getting involved with the exchange. "It's like, you see houses built on the side of a hill and they don't have insurance," Tyler says, "then a mudslide comes along and the houses get destroyed."

By 2013, Karpeles felt like he was achieving his lifelong dream of reaching computers around the world. But while he was enjoying his newfound wealth, the feds suspected his hands might be getting dirty in something nefarious: running Silk Road. In April 2012, investigators were able to identify Silk Road bitcoins being laundered on Mt. Gox. And by that summer, the lead investigator, Jared Der-Yeghiayan, had zeroed in on "a good target," as he later put it: Karpeles.

In an affidavit, Der-Yeghiayan stated there was "probable cause" that the e-mail accounts of Karpeles – whom he described as "a self-proclaimed computer hacker" – would contain evidence on a conspiracy to sell drugs online and run a money-laundering business.

On May 9th, investigators filed a separate affidavit to seize $2 million from Karpeles' U.S. bank accounts for allegedly operating an illegal money-transfer business. By doing this, Karpeles' U.S. busi-

BOTTOM: "THE ASAHI SHIMBUN"/GETTY IMAGES

ness would effectively be shut down. (In a bizarre twist, the investigator who filed the affidavit was later revealed to be Shaun Bridges, one of two Silk Road investigators who broke bad while tracking the site's elusive founder, known as Dread Pirate Roberts. Bridges, a Secret Service agent, had moved $820,000 in stolen bitcoins on Mt. Gox, and some speculate that he ordered the seizure in an attempt to erase traces of his own misdeeds.)

With the feds squeezing Karpeles, Mizuho Bank, the firm in Japan that handled all the international transfers and withdrawals for Mt. Gox, refused to process any more withdrawals from the site. When Mt. Gox customers began complaining that it was taking longer and longer to withdraw money, Karpeles would stall and reply that there was a "backlog" of orders. Meanwhile, the feds cracked the Silk Road case. In October 2013, authorities arrested Ross Ulbricht, a 29-year-old Texan, for running Silk Road. (This past May, Ulbricht was sentenced to life in prison.)

By early 2014, concerns were mounting over Mt. Gox, which "started to look like a roach motel," according to Tyler Winklevoss, who, along with his brother, got out unscathed. But others wouldn't be so fortunate. On February 7th, 2014, Mt. Gox announced it was suspending all withdrawals. The decision sent bitcoin value dropping more than eight percent and created panic online.

The crash showed the power of Mt. Gox – and just how vulnerable the currency was to the company's troubles. "It was the only exchange," says prominent bitcoin investor Barry Silbert, "but it was one of the worst-run businesses." After two long weeks without any new information, customers logged on to Mt. Gox on February 24th to find the most nightmarish thing of all: a blank page. Their worst fears were confirmed when a note appeared on the site. A "decision was taken to close all transactions for the time being," it read.

According to Karpeles, the problem stemmed from what's called a "transaction malleability," a software flaw that allowed people on the outside to manipulate the bitcoin transactions and steal money from the exchange. At first, he tells me, he had no idea how much bitcoin was missing, but the deeper he dug, the worse it became: By his estimate, $650 million in bitcoins were gone. "It really felt unreal," he recalls late one night in a subterranean Tokyo bar. "I don't know how to describe that. When you get a hospital operation without any anesthetic, it hurts at first, but at some point the pain reaches a point where you don't feel anything anymore."

High above the anime billboards and lights of Tokyo, Karpeles hid inside his apartment, terrified. Protesters had flown in from around the world to camp outside his office. Reporters loomed outside his home. He got death threats. "We need an organization to search and torture and kill Mark Karpeles," read one anonymous post on a bitcoin message board. "I didn't feel safe for my life," he tells me.

On February 28th, 2014, Karpeles filed for bankruptcy and held a press conference in Tokyo. As he stood before the cameras in his ill-fitting gray suit, his mind raced. "There were weaknesses in the system," he stammered. "I'm truly sorry to have caused inconvenience." He says he wanted to say more, that he was sorry for what happened, how "devastated" he felt. But instead he just bowed awkwardly in apology as the cameras flashed. "I tried to speak," he tells me, "but I didn't feel any words come out."

"Someone has hundreds of millions of dollars in bitcoin that has not been returned," says an attorney suing Mt. Gox. "All signs point to Mark as the one who did this."

As Mt. Gox's collapse made headlines, it wasn't just the future of bitcoin cast into doubt, but Karpeles' role in the debacle. Suspicions rose that March when the company announced it had found 200,000 bitcoins in a forgotten digital wallet – the equivalent of forgetting $125 million in gold you left under a mattress.

"This isn't something you could accidentally misplace," says Jay Edelson, an attorney representing the 600,000 North American Mt. Gox customers in a class-action suit. Investigators hope to recover the missing bitcoins, a difficult task in an age when someone can hide half a billion dollars on a thumb-drive. "Someone has hundreds of millions of dollars in bitcoin that has not been returned," says Edelson, "and it is out there in the universe."

For the true believers of digital currency, the fall of Mt. Gox and Karpeles' arrest mark the end of bitcoin's Wild West. With major banks such as Goldman Sachs now investing millions in virtual currency exchanges, bullish investors are betting that bitcoin will become "the future of money," as Cameron Winklevoss says. He, along with his brother, is set to launch a Wall Street-friendly exchange called Gemini.

In the meantime, police are still trying to find Mt. Gox's missing hundreds of millions of dollars worth of bitcoins and determine what went wrong. Some blame incompetence. Nicolas Christin, a computer scientist at Carnegie Mellon University, examined several leaked Mt. Gox databases and found evidence of bugs, missing records and internal accounting that was "a horrible mess," he tells me. In the bankruptcy filing, Karpeles acknowledged that he had been aware of vulnerabilities since 2011, leading others to believe he had, at best, overlooked years of leaking funds.

Others insist this was an elaborate theft. In January, after a six-month investigation into Mt. Gox, the Japanese police concluded the heist was at least a "partial inside job." Many people, including the lawyers filing the class-action suit, are pointing to Karpeles himself. "Mt. Gox was run by Mark," says Edelson. "He had control of all the code, all the transactions, and he kept everybody out of the process. All signs point to him as the person who did this."

Karpeles, as of this writing, is still being questioned by Japanese investigators and has not yet been charged with any crimes. He has admitted to reporters that he did create fake bitcoins, but only as "a test" for new software, not with the intent of making himself rich. He has also said he will "of course deny" any charges that may come. So what does he say really happened at Mt. Gox? When I last saw Karpeles at his townhouse in May, he told me he suspected that perhaps someone within the company was the victim of a phishing attack, which allowed an outside hacker access to the Mt. Gox database. "I don't know if there was inside help or not," he says. "I still believe it's very likely someone from the outside coordinated the operation."

Throughout my time with Karpeles in Tokyo, he maintained his innocence with such calm that I was left with two possible conclusions. He's either the greatest criminal mastermind of the digital age or an overeager chump who got in way over his head, and, perhaps, resorted to the most desperate means to get out. But whether he's found guilty or innocent, he's not done dreaming yet. He hopes to take the lessons he's learned at Mt. Gox and create a more secure form of digital cash: "I still want to be on every computer in the world."

Dez Bryant The Survivor

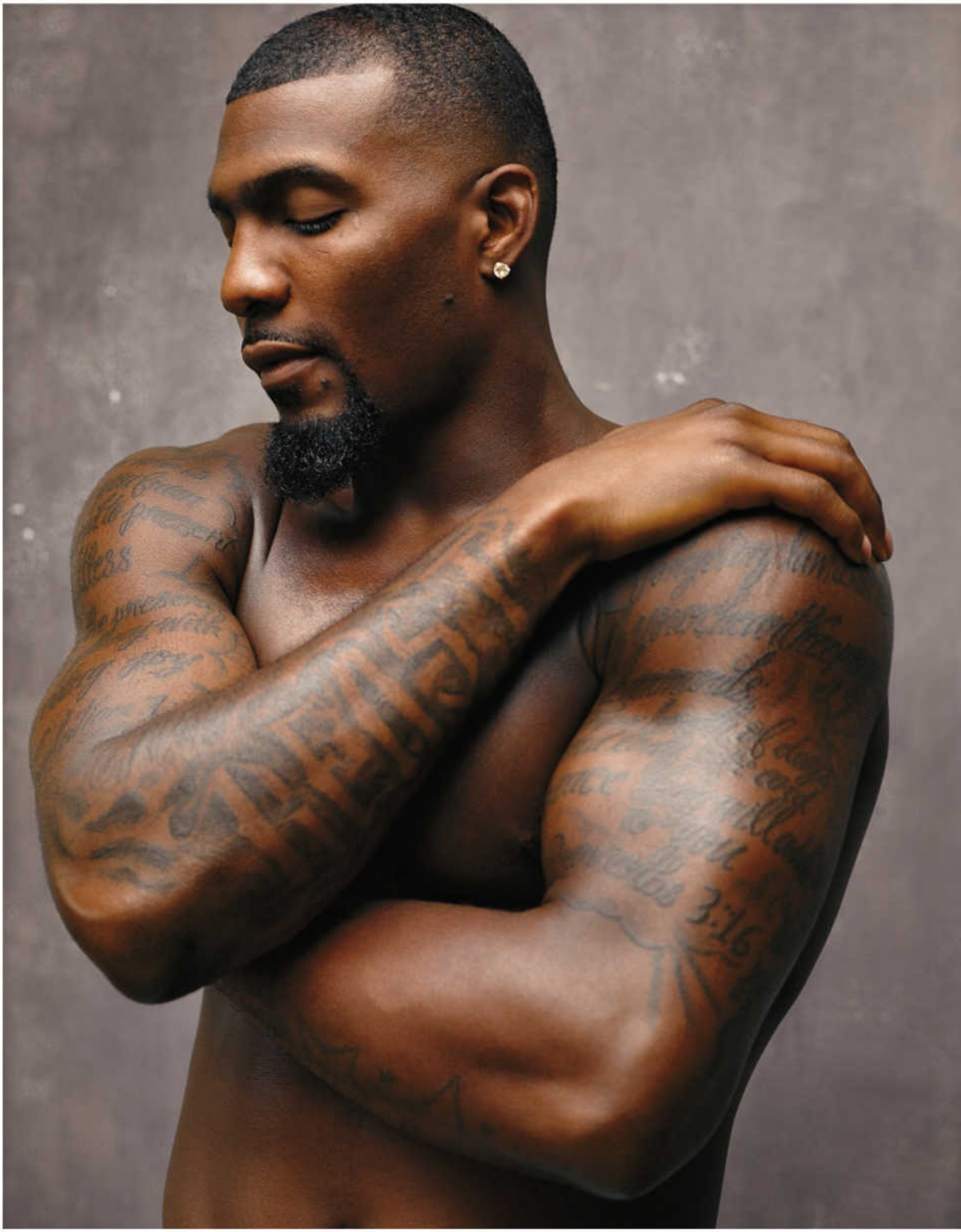
Deep poverty, family drama, mudslinging and power struggles: The trials and triumph of the Dallas Cowboys' most explosive star

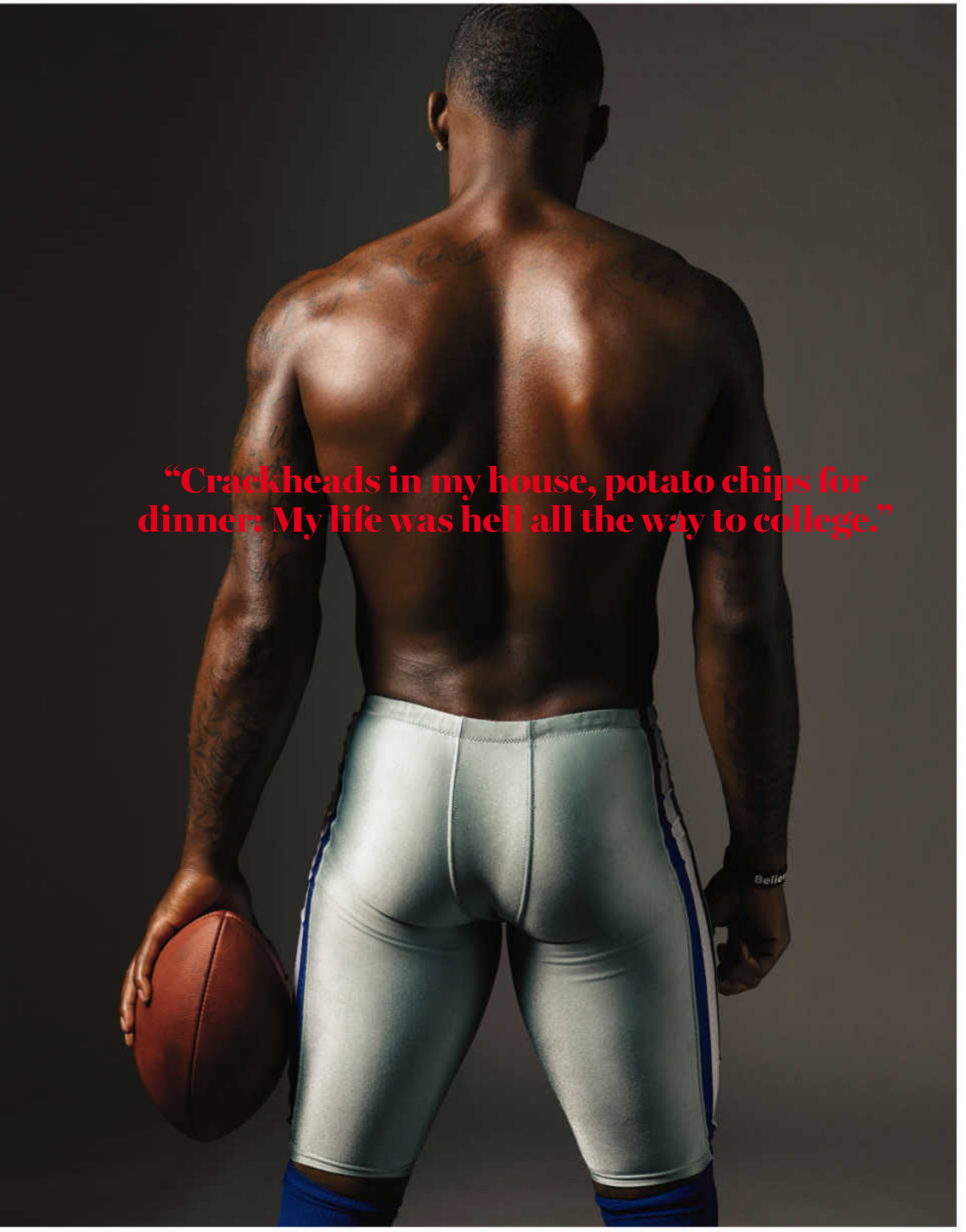
By Paul Solotaroff

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK SELIGER

WHERE DEZ BRYANT WAS raised, they call it the come-up – that Tupac-twisty climb from starveling to stardom, from rags-to-Rolls-Royce royalty. Bryant, whose first five years in the game stack up against any receivers in the Hall of Fame, is a one-of-a-kind wideout with length, strength and speed, a beauty-and-beast-mode cocktail of Randy Moss and Marshawn Lynch. A former first-team All-American whose draft stock cratered when he was suspended from playing in his junior year of college, Bryant has been a bargain for the Dallas Cowboys since they traded up to pick him late in the first round in the spring of 2010: two consecutive Pro Bowls, one All-Pro selection, and a season for the ages last year. ¶ This summer, he's pressing to finally get paid in a manner befitting his stats and rock-star station. He's retained Tom Condon, the premier agent in football, and signed with Jay Z's Roc Nation Sports to handle his contract talks with the Cowboys and broker his marketing deals; and he can't leave his house in suburban Dallas without being swarmed by selfie-seeking fans imploring him to please remain a Cowboy. Anywhere Bryant goes, they come from all directions, many or most of them female. Whatever they're drawn by, it's deeper than sex, though he's drop-dead-Denzel and he knows it. What they want, besides his baby, is to *mother* him, to make sure no one inflicts further harm on a man raised hip-deep in heartbreak. How do they know he's suffered? The way women have always known, whether it was Sam Cooke or Richard Pryor or Marvin Gaye who stood before them: They know a battered star-child when they see one.

Bryant in New York. "When I got to Dallas, they had this picture of me as somebody that I wasn't," he says.




“Crackheads in my house, potato chips for dinner: My life was hell all the way to college.”

But all that's behind him now, the pain and the poverty and not knowing when he'd eat next. The bad old days were charnel-house bad: a grandmother on crack and running the streets; his mother *selling* crack to raise her three kids, all of whom she'd had by 18; the stepmother's house with the lock on the fridge. Here was a kid largely raised by his brother, who also happened to be his uncle; who knocked on neighbors' doors to beg for food stamps; who shared a tiny duplex with more than a dozen people and slept wherever there was room for him on the floor. "Crackheads in my house, potato chips and peanut butter for dinner – my life was shit all the way to college," says Bryant. The news is decidedly better these days: His mother, Angela, has cleaned her act up and is stable and married (to a woman, as it turns out); his siblings avoided the snake pit of drugs and have never been to prison or rehab; and Bryant, at 26, has the world at his feet, after carrying it on his back since he could walk.

So why, sitting across from me at a plush hotel in Dallas, is he cartwheeling between outrage and wracking sobs, vowing to "show those motherfuckers who did me dirty"? Why is he so wounded by the bargaining machinations of reptilian Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, who had refused to make him a five-year offer at the going rate for franchise wide receivers? And why is he spitting fire at the man who gave him refuge after he'd been booted out of Oklahoma State football in 2009, calling David Wells, a black businessman in Dallas and a longtime trusted proxy of the Cowboys, a "thief and a liar" who Bryant says ripped him off?

The answer is, it's *football,* which is as brutal off the field as anything you've ever seen on Sunday. Betrayal, race politics and a purported Walmart tape that may or may not depict a lurid crime: This one's the Super Bowl of player/owner battles, a midnight game of chicken between two bent-for-leather drivers, with the Cowboys' season hanging on the brink.

When you go back a decade and watch video clips of Bryant playing football in high school, what you see is a kid who, in every sense of the word, looked *unstoppable* in life. He wasn't just taller and tauter than those guarding him, with a condor's wingspan and an air-walker's way of taking the game three feet off the ground. He also had the knowledge – the impatient body wisdom – that he was going places the other kids weren't. It's there in every movement: the one-hand grabs; the whipsaw cuts after the catch. Even when he scores, it's clear he's just marking time. *I'm ready for my close-up, Commissioner Goodell.*

Ten years later, the stakes have changed, but Bryant's still a man against boys. At six feet two and 216 pounds, he's LeBron in cleats. The game's most productive wideout since 2012 (almost 4,000 yards total, and more touchdowns – by far – than any other receiver in the game), he's essentially become Dallas' passing attack. Simply put, he does what the greats have always done: makes the extraordinary look ordinary. And vice versa.

In truth, though, no one ever had it harder than Desmond D. Bryant coming up. His mother, the oldest of eight children by six fathers, was impregnated at 14 by her mother's boyfriend, MacArthur Hatton, who'd also sired two of Angela's siblings. Her mom, Virginia, left the house several months later to smoke crack. Angela quit high school, and replaced her mother in Mac's bed, functioning – at 15 – as his spouse. Hatton was in his forties when Dez was born. No one called the cops on him for statutory rape, which should give some sense of the anarchy in that family. Asked about that time, Angela merely shrugs. She had other, more pressing concerns at the moment, like feeding her boy and keeping a roof overhead, and needed Mac's help to do it.

> **I came from nothing and got no problem going back there. Mr. Jones thinks he knows me, but he don't.**

Dez's first memory is of a squalid duplex on the wrong side of Lufkin, Texas. The town of 35,000, in East Texas, was an industrial wormhole of mills and foundries. You could make out all right there if you had a job at one of the plants, which was what Hatton had till he hurt his back. Between the pittance he earned and Angela's income as a motel housekeeper, there was usually very little to eat in the house – or often enough, nothing at all.

"I'm talking at least 15 people," says Bryant. "You'd be lucky if you had a Hot Pocket for dinner. We used to eat at Salvation Army on the regular, when the neighbors couldn't help us out."

Desperate, Angela started slinging crack to make the rent. By the time Dez hit grade school, Mac was off living elsewhere, and she was selling from her door. Dez would come home to find crackheads hanging out – and his exhausted mother buckling under the strain. "The drug game wasn't going how it should go, I guess, and she would get mad and take it out on me," he says. "Hit me with a pipe and threw a car amp at me – slashed me across the back."

Angela got arrested when Dez was nine and served a year and a half in prison for narcotics. He and his two full siblings – both sired by Hatton – moved in with Mac and two of his other kids; Mac barely seemed to notice they were there. "We never, ever had that guidance, as far as report cards and homework," says Bryant. "We just did whatever the hell we wanted to do." (In Mac's defense, he never learned to read or write, and he needed his daughter to read his mail to him.)

Luckily, all Bryant ever wanted to do was have a football in his hands. He gets somber recalling his first day in pads: "Me and my mom" – she was out of prison by then – "went down to the field to sign me up. But when they told us that we needed, you know, to *pay* for the equipment, we…well, we didn't have the…" He breaks off abruptly and ducks his head, holding it in both hands as he sobs. "But I swear on my life, I was blessed that day," says Bryant after composing himself. "There was this abandoned trailer, and on the stoop outside, I seen these shoulder pads and helmet sitting there. The craziest shit was, they actually fit me. I *stole* those, man. I stole 'em and I played."

A tailback and a safety his freshman year of high school, he switched to varsity receiver as a sophomore when Lufkin's wideout got hurt – and he scored the first two times they threw him the ball. Off the field, however, it was protean warfare just to make it to the end of every day. Behind in academics and prone to verbal outbursts, he'd been shunted off to special-ed classrooms since middle school. "His disabilities were emotional, not intellectual, but he'd slipped through the cracks," says Brooke Stafford, a teacher and coach at Lufkin High who put together a program to rescue Bryant. Knowing he couldn't play college ball if he continued on the special-ed track, Stafford recruited a team of teachers to tutor Bryant. They crammed three years of learning into 18 months, and attended to his other, dire needs. "He'd literally have nothing to eat except what he got at school, so we took turns feeding Dez on our dime," says Stafford. Miraculously, Bryant rallied to receive a diploma and to meet the requirements for an NCAA scholarship.

At home, though, Dez had hopped from one fire to another when his father moved

Contributing editor Paul Solotaroff *wrote about fracking pollution in July.*

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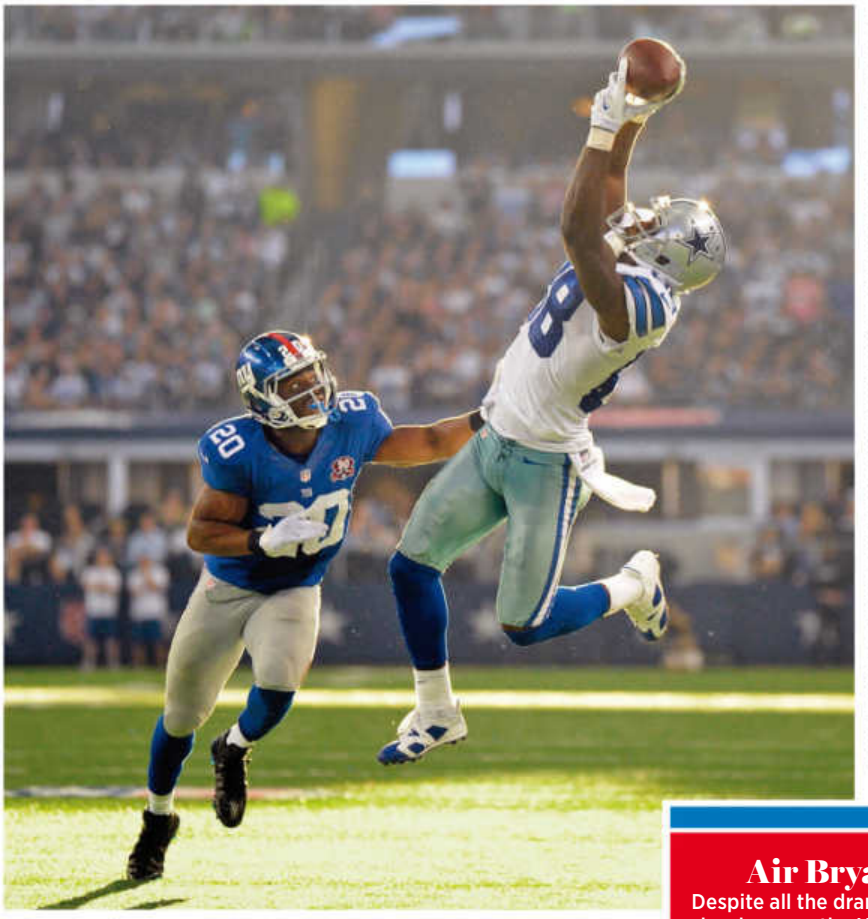

Air Bryant
Despite all the drama, Bryant has become the NFL's most productive receiver.

in with his girlfriend Deidre, the woman who would become his wife. They were 10 people living in a double-wide trailer, including Mac's five kids and her three. "She put this padlock on the fridge, like a big old bike chain, and only opened it up to feed *her* kids," Bryant says. (Deidre Hatton, reached in Jasper, Texas, where she remains with Mac, who's beset by a cluster of serious ailments, disputes that claim, saying that she and Mac did lock the fridge – but only to keep all eight of the kids from eating them out of house and home.)

Soon, says Bryant, she was kicking his siblings to the curb: first his half-sister Ebony, who was 18 and pregnant, then Shaun, 17. Next, it was Dez's turn to hit the street; he got tossed out at the end of his junior year. Deidre denies that she pushed out Dez's siblings, saying they left on their own, and that "me, Mac and my God know what happened." She does concede that she forced Dez to leave, saying, "Dez had a problem with rules and the 'no' word." Happily, his girlfriend's family took him in; the months he spent on their couch were the most stable (and nutritious) of his teens.

This, then, was the Bryant who left for college in 2007 and entered the pro draft three years later: a battle-hardened kid with his eyes on the prize, but whose only life skill was catching a ball. "As good a player as I've ever had, but, man, he had a tough time getting to class," says Gunter Brewer, the wide-receivers coach at North Carolina who coached Randy Moss in college and was Bryant's position coach at OSU. "But he wanted so bad to do the right thing, and he didn't have a stitch of malice or horseshit to him." Bryant was an instant star in college, setting records as a freshman and making All-America as a sophomore. But just weeks into his junior year, he was suspended for the season by the NCAA for a minor infraction. Over the summer of 2009, he'd had dinner with his idol Deion Sanders, the Hall of Fame cornerback. When the NCAA asked about it, Bryant panicked and lied, saying he'd never set foot in Sanders' house. Suddenly, he was out of football and quit college as well, with six months to kill before the draft.

Bryant *did* have a fallback number to dial, though. At an awards dinner that winter, he'd been given an introduction to a very big man around Dallas. David Wells, a cousin of Texas Tech star Michael Crabtree, was presented to Bryant as an urban fixer, a wealthy former bail bondsman who rescued lost souls, particularly those who played for the Dallas Cowboys. Over the phone, Wells told Bryant he could stay in a room in his house and he would cover his expenses. Without discussing terms or a rate of repayment, he bought Bryant the things he'd always craved and never had: expensive jeans and Air Jordans and a Tahoe to knock around Dallas in. The two bonded so tightly that Bryant stayed with Wells through his first couple of years in the league, and had Wells handle his endorsements and in-store signings. Oh, and one more thing: Until he learned to manage a checkbook, Bryant granted Wells power of attorney to oversee his financial matters. It was a decision he's still regretting six years later.

THE DAYS TICKED DOWN TO the contract deadline in July; both sides dug in and didn't budge. The Cowboys, who'd made Bryant a specious offer – nine years, $90 million, only $12 million guaranteed; by comparison, the Detroit Lions gave Calvin Johnson $113 million, the first $53 million guaranteed – and dared Bryant to cave, betting that he was broke or very near it. Meanwhile, Bryant vowed to hold out into the season and sell off what he owned, if need be. "I came from nothing and got no problem going back there," he says. "Mr. Jones thinks he knows me, but he don't know shit."

Now, most contract standoffs between men who've made millions aren't very interesting to those who haven't. But this fight was the exception in that it was *never* about dollars. From the beginning of his tenure in silver-and-blue, Bryant had been typecast as a stock persona: the Crazy Motherfucker whose mind-blowing gifts front a genius for self-destruction. It's a trope as old as the franchise itself: Hollywood Henderson, the crazed-dog blitzer who sucked down cocaine *during* games from an inhaler he stashed in his pads; and, most famously, Michael Irvin, the cosmic receiver with black-hole cravings for hookers and headlines. Two days before his 30th birthday, Irvin was busted by cops in a hot-sheet Dallas motel, where he was found with 10 grams of coke, an ounce of pot and a couple of "self-employed models." Fourteen years later, Jerry Jones anointed Bryant the Next Great Cowboy. So was Bryant initiated, and so perceived: the latest in a long line of head-job talents, all of whom just happened to be black.

"When I got to Dallas, they had this picture of me as somebody that I wasn't," says Bryant. "I was this crazy dude who was out all the time and spending up his money left and right. Man, all I ever bought was some clothes and two cars – and one of those cars was for my girlfriend."

In fact, say people close to him – Antonio Johnson, his schoolboy buddy who played at Baylor with Robert Griffin III;

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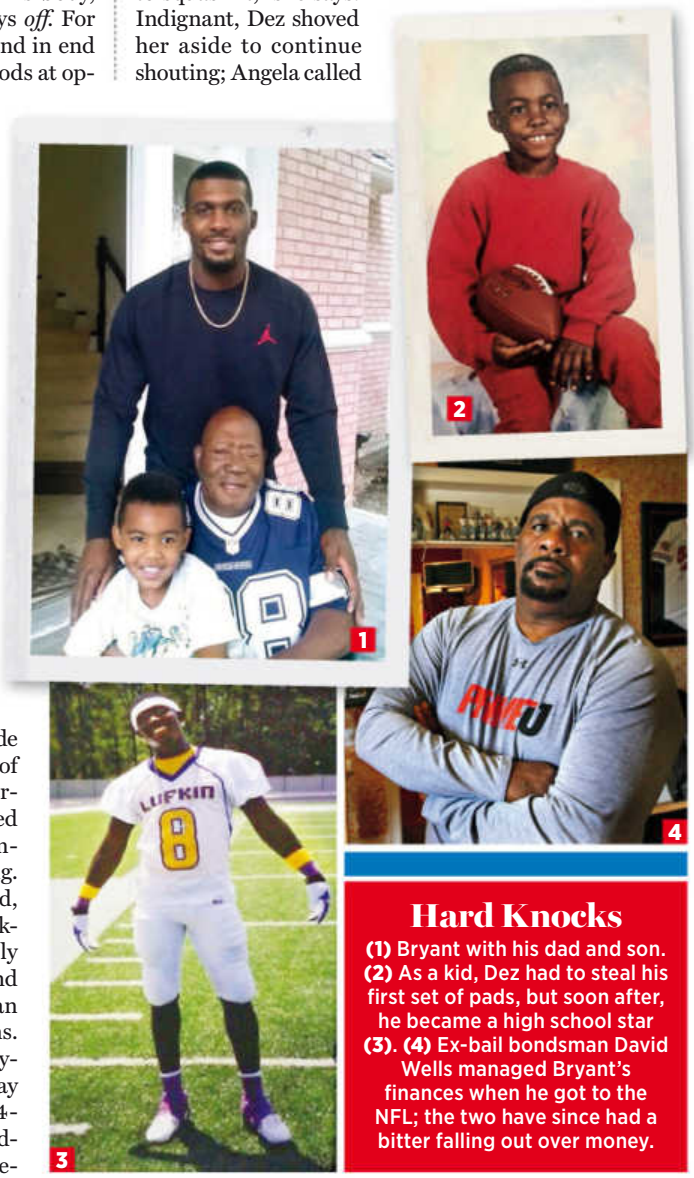
and his half-brother Shaun and full brother Deon, both of whom live with Bryant – Dez is uneasy hanging out in clubs and anxious around groups of strangers. He rarely has a drink, has never touched a drug and is obsessive about his body, working out twice a day on days *off*. For one so expressive on sidelines and in end zones, where he swaggers and nods at opposing fans, crossing his marbled forearms in an X, there's something recessive, almost bashful, about him, as though he's flummoxed by the company of adults. "The thing that sticks out about him is his *innocence,* which is infectious and needs protecting," says Tony Romo, the Cowboys quarterback. "His passion is so intense – even in practice – that guys have no choice but to match his level."

But his vehemence – and his casual disregard for structure; he was often late to meetings and team functions – were read by the Cowboys as markers of something darker: a ghetto man-child's taste for sin and squalor. They seemed to have taken his early missteps for proof he couldn't be trusted: an episode at a mall in which he and some of his friends were tossed for wearing sagging jeans; civil suits filed by a couple of jewelers, claiming they'd been stiffed for bling. And when Bryant was arrested, in the summer of 2012, for striking his mother during a family spat, the Cowboys stepped in and put their boot heel to him with an unprecedented set of conditions. In a contract, according to Bryant's legal team, he agreed to pay Wells $17,000 a month for 24-hour security; to be home by midnight, and install cameras to record his comings and goings; and to bar anyone, including friends and family, from paying visits without prior consent from Wells.

It's unclear why Bryant would sign such a pact; he himself is murky on the subject. Tied to Wells in some ill-defined way in the three-plus years he'd been in Dallas, Bryant had come to believe that his mentor was stealing from him. There were marketing checks, he says, that he never received, and believes Wells pocketed. "I was *done* with him, man – I'd seen through his shit," says Bryant. "But then the thing happened with my mom, and that just let him right back in again."

That "thing with my mom" is equally obscure. Angela Bryant, who lives close to Dez outside Dallas and has had no trouble with the law in six years, says he'd been arguing with one of his brothers over a bottle of Sprite taken from his fridge. "Next thing, they're at *my* house raising their voices, and I had to step between 'em to try to squash it," she says. Indignant, Dez shoved her aside to continue shouting; Angela called the cops not because she'd been pushed but because "I couldn't calm Dez down no kind of way."



Hard Knocks

(1) Bryant with his dad and son. **(2)** As a kid, Dez had to steal his first set of pads, but soon after, he became a high school star **(3). (4)** Ex-bail bondsman David Wells managed Bryant's finances when he got to the NFL; the two have since had a bitter falling out over money.

He was charged with a misdemeanor for domestic assault, though Angela urged the DA not to file: "Dez got a temper that he needed to get a hold of, not to get hit with a case." Bryant's charges were dismissed after he agreed to counseling. Since then he's had no other encounters with law enforcement. By Dallas Cowboys standards, that makes him a saint. This is the team, after all, that went out last spring and signed Greg Hardy, a player who beat and choked a woman. (The charges were later dismissed.) Yet "they treat me like I'm some kind of one-man crime wave," Bryant says. "I told Mr. Jones, 'I'm not Michael Irvin,' but he wasn't trying to hear me out."

Afraid that the Cowboys would cut or trade him if he didn't accede to their terms, he signed the agreement, which, according to his legal team, let them garnish his salary to cover Wells' fee each month. Meanwhile, Wells had power of attorney, which meant he had access to Bryant's bank accounts, where his game checks were wired. It wasn't until last winter, after hiring Roc Nation, that he got a fuller sense of what he calls "the foul play" involved.

Per a review of his finances by TravisWolff, an accounting firm he hired last February, between $700,000 and $900,000 of Bryant's money went to Wells or unidentified accounts. This included $377,000 paid to Wells or companies owned by him (part of which was the $17,000 monthly payments), an estimated $85,000 went to insure six cars not in Bryant's name, at least one of which belonged to Wells, and checks made out to Bryant that his financial team still hasn't been able to locate. Wells denies any wrongdoing. "I've made over $10 million, so why would I need his money?" says Wells. "Do you know who took care of Dez during the lockout? It was *me,* that's who!"

Bryant's team, for its part, continues to try to untangle the financial mess. "As an agent with fiduciary duties to his client, Wells would have had the right to take his agreed-upon fee," says Jordan Siev, a lawyer who works with Roc Nation and represents Bryant. "But it wouldn't give him the right to help himself to additional funds of Dez's."

So who is David Wells, and how did this hulking ex-bail bondsman work his way into the Dallas Cowboys' graces? Six years before he came to Jones' attention as the burly bodyguard for Michael Irvin, he was a uniformed auxiliary for the Dallas Police Department who got fired over a missing pair of boxing gloves. He then became a private eye specializing in rounding up witnesses for trial. This connected him with judges and prominent

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM: COURTESY OF DEZ BRYANT, 3; LOUIS DELUCA/"DALLAS MORNING NEWS"/CORBIS

lawyers like state Sen. Royce West, who later helped Wells put out a shingle for David's Bail Bonds without Wells investing a single dime of his own. (West also represented Irvin and Bryant in their legal troubles.) In short order, Wells was rolling around town in a Navigator with vanity tags that said BAIL ME. Cash poured in but didn't always go out: In 2008, Wells pleaded guilty to tax evasion to avoid doing time. According to Bryant's legal team, Wells has been sued multiple times – for everything from fraud to unpaid debts and nonpayment of city taxes, with judgments exceeding $1 million.

Remarkably, none of this troubled the Cowboys, who've retained him to run background checks on players. Over the phone, Wells claimed to have served the team as a "crisis-management expert" since the 1990s, when he assisted Irvin in completing his community-service hours after Irvin pleaded no contest to felony cocaine possession. Describing himself as the "black Ray Donovan," he told me he'd worked closely with many fallen stars, including Erik Williams, an All-Pro lineman accused of gang rape (the allegations were later proved false); and Pacman Jones, who *was* a one-man crime wave when Dallas obtained him from Tennessee (six arrests in two years as a Titan, a season-long suspension and an ugly altercation in a Vegas strip club that culminated in three people shot). Asked what he'd done to try to put those men right, Wells says, "I'm one of the most credible people in courthouse circles, and have a relationship with every sitting judge in Dallas and with three different district attorneys."

> **The Cowboys treat me like I'm a one-man crime wave. I told Mr. Jones: 'I'm not Michael Irvin.'**

In two conversations lasting a total of an hour and a half, we went point for point through his dealings with Bryant. In the first call, he said he'd spent "hundreds of thousands of dollars" on Bryant and his family; let him live rent-free the first three years he was in Dallas; paid at least part of Bryant's jewelry debts, a total sum of nearly $1 million; created lucrative deals for him with Air Jordan and BioSteel – and never received "a dime back for any of that from Dez."

However, Bryant's tax adviser John Karls tells a vastly different story. He claims there was a bank account set up under the name "David Wells c/o Dez Bryant" that Dez couldn't touch, and it received $75,000 in wires from the deal with BioSteel. Additionally, Karls says, electronic payments were made out of Bryant's accounts for mortgage and monthly bills with Wells' name in the transaction description during 2010-13, the same time Wells says Bryant was living rent-free at his house. As for the nearly $1 million jewelry debt? Bryant took a bank loan from Chambers Bank to pay that off. Presented with these facts, Wells responds: "If Roc Nation wants to bring charges, they're welcome to. But they better be aware of everything that's out there, 'cause I'm gonna be able to depose Dez Bryant – and I know things that *they* don't."

This, then, is the man the Cowboys turned to in 2012 when Bryant was arrested for pushing his mother. "Dez was under scrutiny from law enforcement, and there were people trying to take advantage of him," says Stephen Jones, Jerry Jones' oldest son and the Cowboys' CEO. "We thought it was in his and our best interests to protect him with more security." Stunned, Bryant told Jerry Jones he wouldn't pay Wells, but Jones, he says, insisted.

For the next two and a half years, Bryant paid and seethed, counting down the days till his Dallas deal ended and he could fire Wells – who says he still works with the Cowboys. (The Cowboys confirm that they have paid Wells to provide background information on prospective players, but say that they've never hired him to work with individual players on the team.)

When Bryant signed with Roc Nation last November, the reaction in Dallas was reportedly toxic. Word spread that Bryant had "gone against the wishes" of Jerry Jones and that Jones was "reluctant to deal with Roc Nation," as if Bryant had switched over to Death Row Records, not a top sports-rep shop. Then *someone* turned the dog whistle of race up till it was practically deafening. ESPN's Adam Schefter said he'd spent months digging for a security-cam tape of Bryant assaulting a woman in a Walmart parking lot. Mike Florio of *Pro Football Talk* went him one better, saying the release of the video was "inevitable" and that "we're going to see something in the next month." Rumors swirled all winter that the tape was being shopped, and that the act it depicted was "five times worse" than Ray Rice's punch-out of his fiancée. Bryant had a hunch where all this came from.

"The first time I heard that was from Mr. Jones last season: He said there was a tape of me that might get out," says Bryant. He'd scoffed at Jones, saying that no such thing existed. Then Schefter and Florio aired their stories in February, and Bryant took to Twitter in a rage. "I can't continue to get betrayed like this," he wrote. "I used to let people take advantage of my life. Now that I'm no longer allowing that to happen, it seems to be a problem." The tape never surfaced, and local cops put the story to rest, saying they'd looked into the tape's existence and found nothing. In my last call to Wells, I asked if *he* had leaked the story, either to the Joneses or to the media. He denied it, saying that if Bryant thought so, then so be it. "But have you *seen* the police report? Have you *heard* the 911 call? *Something* happened in that parking lot, and I didn't drum it up!"

It's worth noting that Wells says he was at Cowboys camp both times we spoke. Why was he staying at the team hotel and attending practices that first week? "I'm in camp to help any player Jerry sends my way," says Wells, though he declined to mention names. Wondering if he meant Randy Gregory and La'el Collins, two ballyhooed but scandal-tainted Cowboys rookies, I asked Bryant if he planned to warn them. "Man, I'm way ahead of you," he says. "I called them the minute they joined the team. And just *let* Dave try to mess with Greg Hardy. He'll slap the bitch right outta him!"

Two days before the deadline, I called Bryant's agent. No progress, Tom Condon said with a sigh. And then, on July 14th, Jerry Jones and Roc Nation agreed to a last-ditch sit-down in New York. He met with Jay Z and the sports agency's president, Juan Perez; the shape of an agreement quickly came together. Late that night, Bryant's agent told him over the phone that they'd gotten something too good to pass up: a five-year deal for $70 million, with $45 million of it guaranteed. In short, Jones had caved after having his bluff called. He wasn't willing to blow his first shot in two decades at reaching a Super Bowl, or fracture a team so dependent on Bryant for his fire and big-play bravura. "His passion sets the tone for us," Romo told me. "If he'd held out through camp, I'd have driven to his house and handed him my game check to suit up."

Bryant got off the phone with his agent at 3 a.m.; he immediately called his mom to break the news. When the ringing didn't wake her, he drove to her place. They sat up laughing and crying till dawn, reliving their long, strange road out of Lufkin. "So many hard times, so many tears – but look where my baby brought us to," says Angela Bryant, still a little throaty days later. "The stuff they talked about him, the lies they put out there: They don't know what he's been through. But people need to find out, 'cause it's a beautiful story. He's a *miracle* – and that's not just Mama talking."

"I don't necessarily want to be heard, unless it's about football."

Andrew Luck The Natural

The league's best QB might be its most humble and likable superstar

By Matt Taibbi

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK SELIGER

EARLY IN THE MORNING, in a little place called Joanie's Cafe in Palo Alto, just outside the Stanford campus, Andrew Luck sits down for breakfast. He's dressed in a blue T-shirt and shorts, with his trademark sea-captain beard.

If anyone recognizes him, they don't say anything. The star quarterback of the Indianapolis Colts doesn't look like a hotshot athlete at first glance. If anything, he looks like a slightly oversize version of any other Stanford student, which is what this school allowed him to be when he studied here. At an SEC or Big 10 school, an athlete of Luck's stature would have been worshipped like a god everywhere he went. But at Stanford, he got to be just another teenager for a little bit longer.

"The nice thing about going to Stanford was that you didn't live in a fishbowl," he says. "You had a lot of license to sort of be a normal dude. You know, there were people that were doing way cooler things than playing quarterback on Saturday. Curing cancer. Stem-cell research. Composing incredible scores."

He pauses. "It was very good, at 19 years old, not to have to deal with intense fame, per se. Because that can mess with your psyche, if you're at a really young age."

That was then. Now Luck is about to turn 26 and is on the verge of being one of the most famous people in America. Like his counterpart in the NBA, LeBron James, Luck was anointed for greatness by scouts at an absurdly early age, yet has managed to remain either on or even slightly ahead of the preposterous expectations set for him by the sports-media hype machine.

In his first three seasons as a pro, he's smashed franchise passing records and advanced further in the playoffs each year. If form holds true, he'll reach the Super Bowl this year. And even if he doesn't win it all this year, it's the expectation of just about everyone in the sport that sometime in the near future there will be a changing of the guard, and he'll become the marquee player in an NFL that for 15 years has been dominated by Peyton Manning and Tom Brady.

But America isn't the Stanford campus. For better or worse, this country cares a lot more about its sports stars than it does about composers or cancer researchers.

So when the public looks deeply at Luck, what are they going to find?

As great as he is on the field, Luck is maybe more impressive off it. He's grounded, levelheaded, courteous and self-deprecating. He seems absolutely dedicated to his job, but he also has interests outside of football and perspective about its relative importance. Even while succeeding in one of the most unforgiving high-pressure environments you can find in America, he retains a bit of a philosophical attitude, wondering what it all means and what, if anything, he should do with the platform he's won.

Luck comes across as a person who could accomplish anything in life, and that's not restricted to football.

But right now, it's *all* about football. Luck thinks about other things, from architecture to politics, but feels it's not the right time to talk about any of them. "I don't think it's my job to talk about politics," he says. "It's not my job to opine on things. I understand as an athlete, especially as a quarterback, you have this platform where you can be heard by a lot of people. But I don't necessarily want to be heard, unless it's about football."

ANDREW LUCK WAS BORN into pro sports. His father, Oliver Luck, was a star quarterback at West Virginia University, was drafted in the second round by the Houston Oilers in 1982 and carved out a career as a backup to the legendary Warren Moon.

He retired before Andrew was born, and in the Nineties he worked in Europe as an executive in the now-defunct World League of American Football. Andrew, as a result, spent a lot of his early childhood in Germany, where his father managed teams. At one point, Oliver worked alongside another ex-quarterback, former Washington State great Jack Elway, who had coached at Stanford and had a son, John, who was on his way to the Hall of Fame. Reached by phone, Oliver remembers Jack coming over to his Frankfurt home for a barbecue one evening.

"Andrew may have been two years, three years old – he was an infant still," Oliver Luck recalls. "For some reason, Jack looked at his calves. And he said, 'Your little boy has really nice calves. He might be a player someday.'"

Oliver laughs. "For some reason I remember that, because it was a really odd comment," he says. "Of course, he had a pretty successful son himself."

Still, the elder Luck never forced sports on any of his four children (Andrew has two sisters and a younger brother). "He never pushed us to play," Andrew says. "The only rule was if you start a season in a sport, you have to finish that sport." While his brother, Addison, became an accomplished soccer player, Andrew took after his NFL father, whom he idolized.

Luck returned to the U.S. when he was in the fourth grade, moving to Texas, where he started to play Pop Warner football. "I was a defensive end and a backup quarterback," he says. "I loved it."

He went on to have enormous success as a quarterback in the madhouse that is Texas high school football, passing for more than four miles of yardage at Houston's Stratford High, in addition to graduating as the school's co-valedictorian (there are a lot of these perfect-humanoid details cluttering up the margins of Luck's biography). But even back then, he never had a road-to-Damascus moment when he suddenly decided he was going to play in the NFL.

"It went in stages," he says. "I started playing high school football as a sophomore, and I thought, 'OK, maybe I'm good enough to play in college.' Then in college, I play a year, and I think, 'OK, maybe I'm good enough to play in the NFL.' But it was never like I was thinking, 'I'm good enough to play in the NFL.'"

Scouts, however, knew where he was headed. Among other things, he earned the school's starting job out of training camp as a redshirt freshman, something a long line of celebrated Stanford quarterbacks had never done – a list that includes Elway, Trent Edwards and Jim Plunkett.

In 2009, his first year as a college starter, Luck threw for 2,575 yards and led the Cardinal to its first winning season in ages. Standing six feet four and 235 pounds with the prototypical cannon arm and the running ability of a Steve Young, he was so good that draftniks immediately pegged him as the first pick in the 2011 draft. Luck himself blocked out the hype and decided to finish school.

"After playing that year, it was, 'All right, I think that I have a chance to do this,'" he says. "'But why think about it? I still have two more years left here.'"

The rest of the story is well-known. Luck went on to be that number-one pick and more or less instantly took the NFL by storm, stepping into the shoes of departed megastar Peyton Manning in Indianapolis and meeting or exceeding nearly every one of the legendary Colt's accomplishments.

Luck has gotten so good so fast that it's reasonable to wonder if he has any flaws at all as a pro quarterback. He's set the record for most passing yards for a rookie, most yards for a player in his first two years, and most yards for a player in his first three years. As he enters his fourth season, about the only knocks on him are a very slight tendency toward untimely turnovers, and a couple of disappointingly uncompetitive losses in the playoffs.

As far as the latter issue goes, a few commentators have wondered aloud if Luck is maybe too nice a guy, that maybe this is the Achilles' heel of this otherwise creepily unblemished athlete. The questions grew louder after news reports emerged that Luck routinely compliments NFL players who sack him or knock him down, saying things like, "Hey, nice hit!" as they try to beat his head in. It's a tactic that genuinely mystifies the defenses whose job it is to kick the crap out of him.

"In all the years I've played football, I've never heard anything like it," Washington Redskins pass rusher Ryan Kerrigan once said.

Niceness is generally not a salutary quality in an NFL star. I ask Luck, "Don't you have to be a little bit of a jerk to be a successful NFL quarterback?"

> **If you play quarterback long enough, then you have to have skin like an armadillo.**

"I do think that you do have to be a little bit of an asshole sometimes," he says, with a smile. "But it has to come off from within your own personality. If it's not, it comes off as phony and disingenuous."

He explains that at Stanford, his infamously irascible coach, Jim Harbaugh, told him to lead, but within his personality. If you're a yeller, yell. If you're not, don't.

"That's not to say your personality can't change over time," Luck says. "I definitely feel more comfortable making my opinion heard. And if it's telling a guy in not-so-nice words what I think, maybe that's the way to do it."

Still, it's hard to imagine Luck angrily dressing his guys down on TV, like a Brady or a Manning. More than anything, it seems Luck's leadership technique is just to play so completely out of his mind that his teammates have to listen to him.

Luck also seems like a test case for another sports myth, the idea that athletes who are too smart can be at a disadvantage. The most famous modern fairy tale along these lines comes from *Moneyball*.

In the book, Oakland A's general manager Billy Beane describes how he washed

Contributing editor MATT TAIBBI *hit the GOP campaign trail last issue.*

OPENING PHOTOGRAPH: PRODUCED BY RUTH LEVY AND BRIAN LONG/LONG PRODUCTIONS

out as a minor-league outfielder because he was wound too tight. Meanwhile, a minor-league teammate, the future star Lenny Dykstra, who, to put it euphemistically, was so mentally unconcerned he didn't even know who was pitching sometimes, was "perfectly designed, emotionally, to play the game of baseball."

I ask Luck if thinking too much can be a problem in football. "Yeah, especially when preparing for a game when you're watching film, there's an infinite amount of film you can watch," he says. "You go, 'All right, who's the defensive coordinator? Let me get his games for the past five years. Who's the head coach? Is he with the Holmgren tree? Is this a Rex Ryan or a Buddy Ryan disciple?'

"I try to cut out the white noise. What doesn't really help you? What's going to bog you down?" He pauses, explaining that the trick is to turn all that study into muscle memory and instinct. "That's why it's so important to log those experiences in your mind. Because those count so much more than what you've seen on film."

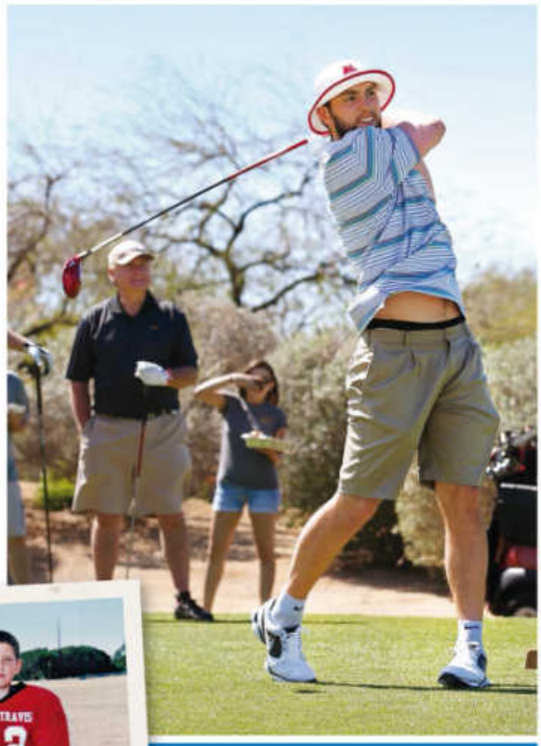
LUCK'S POLITENESS AND HIS SELF-effacing demeanor, coupled with a spate of stories about his eccentric range of off-field interests – teammates have outed him to reporters for reading a book about concrete, for instance – have led to media caricatures as a brainy interloper in a decidedly unintellectual game.

But Luck doesn't come across as a nerd. He's a normal guy who happens to read the occasional book in his spare time (his latest choices, he says, include *The Architect's Apprentice*, by the prominent Turkish female novelist Elif Shafak, and *Lawrence in Arabia*, a bio of T. E. Lawrence). He doesn't mind talking about what he reads, but he also doesn't come across like one of those Seventies-counterculture intellectuals like Bill Walton or Dock Ellis who always seemed a little embarrassed to be making a living playing sports.

On the contrary, if there's one thing that shines through when you listen to Andrew Luck talk, it's that the guy absolutely loves everything about football. He'll talk about architecture or literature, sure, but his eyes really light up when he talks about the game his father played.

Luck is a quarterback now, which means he spends more time getting hit than hitting, but he misses playing defensive end as a Pop Warner player. "I do," he says with a laugh. "It's part of football, hitting people and getting blocked and trying to get off the blocks." But asked if he thinks that the violence is what makes the game so popular, he shakes his head.

"I hesitate to say violence," he says. "It's maybe a bit of that gladiatorial feel, with the pads and helmet. But you have so many different body types on the field playing – 350-pounders playing with 180-pounders. Fast little guys with big strong guys. All different shapes and sizes and colors and backgrounds working together, and doing totally different things for the same end purpose. That's pretty cool."



All-American
Luck on the golf course and as a Pop Warner player, where he was a QB and a defensive end. He says he misses hitting people on defense: "It's a part of football."

Luck spends a lot of time talking about the diversity of an NFL locker room. It's clear that the camaraderie with players like Robert Mathis and (now ex-Colt) Reggie Wayne and Adam Vinatieri ("I'm closer in age to his kids than him," Luck notes) is a big part of what he loves about the job.

As far as the game itself goes, Luck is in rare air. He's mastered his position so completely at such a young age that he's down to making very minor alterations in search of improvement. This offseason, his focus is mainly on two things: improving in the red zone and cutting down on interceptions. He seems particularly miffed about the interceptions, not that he had that many – just 16, against 40 touchdowns, last year.

"You can't repeat mistakes, and that's what gets you in trouble," he says. "That's why I'm disappointed in all the interceptions, because they were repeated mistakes, and you can't do that."

He enters into a long soliloquy about interceptions and what causes them. It's obvious he thinks about this a lot. He goes on for so long that it's funny. He explains that there are three kinds of picks. First, there are the ones that aren't the quarterback's fault, like tipped balls or guys running to the wrong spot. Then, there are mental errors, like throwing to the wrong place. Finally, there are bad throws. "You just missed the guy completely and threw it behind him," he says. "That shouldn't happen as a third-year NFL quarterback." He pauses, then adds in a serious voice, "You shouldn't miss guys."

That Andrew Luck is determined to cut back on maybe three or four bad throws a year should freak out all of the other teams in the league. It's hard to imagine that whatever little tweaks he still needs to make, he won't make. He's already put up historic numbers. The only thing left is the Super Bowl, and the scrutiny that comes with it.

Americans love to turn on their celebrities. In sports especially, we root for them on the way up, then pelt them on the way down. Once-adored superstars like LeBron and Brady became villains after too many years in contention. I ask Luck about that phenomenon given that it might be in his future. His answer is hilarious.

"I bet Tom Brady doesn't give a shit about what people think about him," he says. "Or Peyton. You play quarterback long enough, you hear some things. You have to have skin like an armadillo."

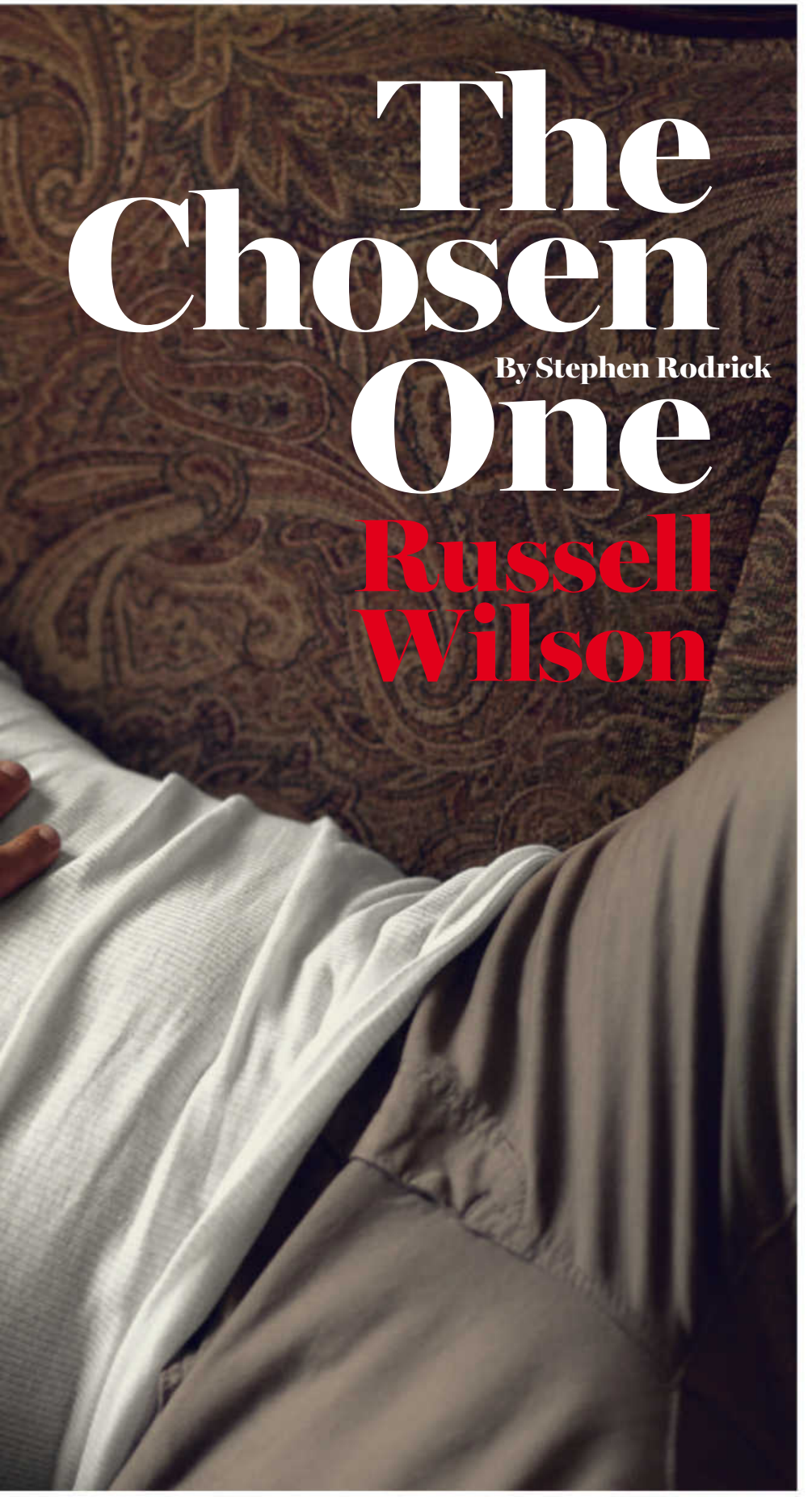
In Luck's first years in the NFL, he talked occasionally of struggling with all of the attention. He told reporters last year that he still had a hard time with what he called the "animal-in-a-zoo sort of thing."

As for what he'll do after football, when he'll likely be able to pick any job he wants (I half-jokingly suggest the White House as a transitional job), Luck says he'll probably stay out of sight. "I think more than likely I will live somewhere like a hermit for many years," he says, laughing. "Get away. Something."

But right now, on the field, this is Luck's moment. And no matter what, it's going to be fun to watch.

FROM TOP: KARL WALTER/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF THE LUCK FAMILY

"Next time we're gonna win the game. I'll be there. I won't let you down."



The Chosen One

By Stephen Rodrick

Russell Wilson

He's been groomed since birth to be one thing: the perfect NFL quarterback

THRONED AND DETHRONED Super Bowl quarterback Russell Wilson is working the artificial turf at the University of Southern California. Nearly 300 kids are screaming his name at a session of the Russell Wilson Passing Academy when he says something that cuts to the core of his being. Wilson is wearing a T-shirt and shorts with a Gatorade towel draped from his waist when he grabs a cup of purple liquid and downs it in a single gulp. He locks me in his gaze and smiles.

"Isn't Gatorade the best? Just the best."

Did I mention that Gatorade is one of the event's sponsors? The thing is, Russell Wilson really, really believes Gatorade is tasty. He believes in things with a zealot's certainty – God, corporations, his talent, Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror," etc. The interception he threw a yard short of his second Super Bowl championship? Before he got to the sideline, God told him that it was part of His plan. The public announcement that he was practicing abstinence with slinky pop singer Ciara? Russell Wilson was put here to guide her to a better place.

After three years in the NFL, Wilson has 36 regular-season wins, the most by a three-year quarterback in history. And despite the unpleasantness in last February's Super Bowl, he already owns a championship ring. He was a standout at a prestigious Richmond, Virginia, prep school, All-ACC at North Carolina State and, after a disagreement with his coach about missing spring practice to play baseball, transferred to Wisconsin and promptly led the Badgers to the Rose Bowl. He knows all things come through Scripture, discipline and time management. Unlike many camps run by pros, Wilson isn't a figurehead putting down the bong and popping in for a few minutes. He lines the kids up

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK SELIGER

with Prussian efficiency for a grip-and-grin photo and an autograph. (Wilson signed at least 1,500 autographs during the week I followed him.)

"I've never seen anyone able to adapt to different situations and groups so quickly," says Mark Rodgers, his agent, who is guiding Wilson through a difficult contract renegotiation with the Seattle Seahawks. "He's like a great politician."

A benevolent dictator, to be more precise. The California sun is scorching the children when Wilson, 26, brings together his brain trust, an all-white group of friends, including Rodgers' son Matthew, who have been equated to *Entourage* (Wilson has a cameo in the movie). But *Entourage* was a quasi-democracy. Wilson runs the show here.

"You could tell him the sky is blue and he would be like, 'No, man, the sky is green,'" says his older brother, Harry. (There's also a younger sister, Anna.) "He's probably the most confident person I've ever known – and a tough guy to figure out."

Wilson huddles with his boys and tells them they're falling behind schedule. "We have to be on to the next drill at 11:20," he says. The guys nod solemnly.

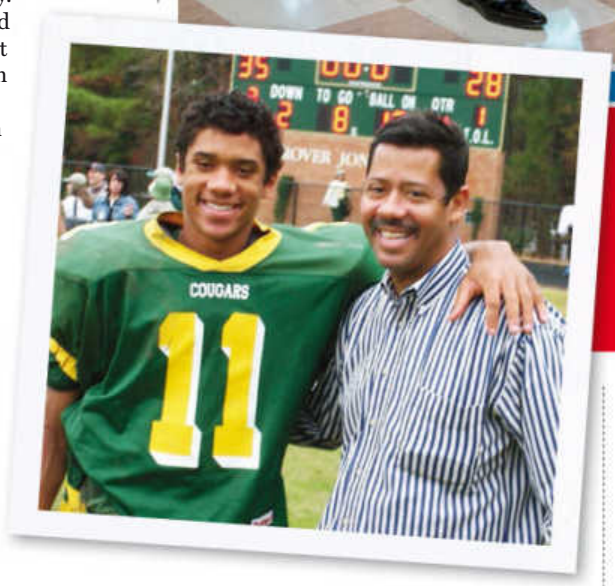
He turns to me and smiles. "Time management is leadership. I got that from my dad."

The camp churns on with the occasional hiccup. Wilson's music tastes run to mostly Seventies and Eighties soul, and the PA system blasts Sly Stone's "Everyday People" when a brash nine- or 10-year-old tugs at his towel and makes reference to last season's Super Bowl. With the season on the line, the Seahawks chose a quick slant pass from the one-yard line instead of giving the ball to all-world running back Marshawn Lynch. The result was gridiron apocalypse, with Patriots defensive back Malcolm Butler stepping in front of Wilson's throw. The boy asks, "Why didn't you just give it to Marshawn?" He makes a Hulk-like move and shouts Lynch's nickname: "*Beast Mode!*"

Wilson grimaces but doesn't say anything until someone tugs at the rope bands around his wrist. One of them is in memory of his father, Harrison, Russell's North Star, who died in 2010 from complications of diabetes.

"Hey, don't pull on those," says Wilson, his voice rising for a moment. "They're very important to me. That's not cool."

Contributing editor Stephen Rodrick *wrote about Ringo Starr in April.*



Family Man
With girlfriend Ciara Harris at a state dinner at the White House in April (above). Left: Celebrating with his father, Harrison Wilson, after a high school victory in Richmond, Virginia, 2006. "My dad was a hardworking guy. I miss him every day."

Harrison Wilson III, a Dartmouth football star and a UVA law graduate, is central to his son's creation myth. Harrison waited until after law school to try out for the San Diego Chargers and still almost made the team. He played catch with his son on mornings before school and made it to nearly every one of his games. "Harrison Wilson could do no wrong" has always been the narrative. His son's image is just as carefully burnished, with only a hint of imperfection: Russell admits to being an asshole as a kid. "I was a bully," he tells me later. "I used to beat up people, throw people against the wall and knock their teeth out." (Brother Harry suggests this is a slight exaggeration on little brother's part. He says that Russell had a temper, but the idea that he terrorized kids? "No.")

Whatever anger Russell had was bled out when he was 14 and found God one night at his football camp. A dream conveyed to him that his father wouldn't be with him forever and he needed to get right with Jesus. Wilson replaced tantrums with focus. Even as a seven-year-old in T-ball, he'd reposition players, and if the ball was hit to him, he'd run it to first base, lest anyone else screw up his play.

"There's some OCD," says Harry. "Hyperfocused, detail-oriented – whatever it is, he's got a crazy amount of it."

Wilson doesn't talk about where the anger came from, but it's clear the drive comes from his father's example. Harrison moved back to Virginia to be closer to family and to try to live up to his own dad, Harrison II, who was the president of Norfolk State University. But III's law career suffered as he shifted from a corporate firm to private practice. "If my dad was here, he'd say he left a lot on the table," says Harry.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: PRODUCED BY RUTH LEVY; THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: ANDREW HARRER/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES; ANDY GARRIGUE/COURTESY OF DARTMOUTH ATHLETICS

What he instilled in his youngest son was the idea that someone was always watching. He began coaching Russell through fake press conferences when the boy was seven. The end result is Wilson is often snarked at for never saying the wrong thing and always being on message. That's Harrison's work.

"My brother's known for his clichés," says Harry. "But that's who my dad was too. My dad was like an old sitcom: There's always a lesson at the end of it, you know? Like a *Fresh Prince* episode."

Wilson was married to his high school sweetheart in 2012, but they divorced shortly after the Seahawks' Super Bowl victory in 2014. He played his cards so close that his only brother had no idea that he was having problems until the marriage was over. "I can't understand how he does it, how he compartmentalizes," says Harry, who played football and baseball at the University of Richmond.

Last season, there were unsubstantiated rumors that Wilson's goody-two-shoes routine was wearing thin with his teammates; whispers leaked with the loaded line that he wasn't black enough. The divorce is off-limits as a topic, and the race question makes Wilson's back stiffen. He answers questions carefully and generically like, well, a kid who's been practicing press conferences his entire life.

> **I was a bully. I used to beat up people, throw people against the wall and knock their teeth out.**

Wilson lets his faceplate slip only once at camp; it's when Ciara's tiny son, Future, shows up with his nanny. Wilson trots to the sideline and takes 10 minutes to roll the kid a ball, play patty-cake and exchange high-fives. It's a rare unscripted – or seemingly unscripted – moment for Wilson, whose greatest trait as a quarterback is his escapability on the field with defenders and off the field with the media.

With Future (his father is the rapper of the same name), Wilson seems to uncoil, but he quickly snaps back into game mode. There are awards to be proffered and a dance-off among five kids to judge. Afterward, kids and parents get to ask questions. Wilson is most comfortable answering queries about his "Morning in America" work ethic, detailing how he graduated from college in three years while playing football and baseball. Then someone asks about the interception. He is polite, but curt. "This is the sixth location I've been at in this wonderful, beautiful country, and I seem to get that question everywhere I go," says Wilson. "The play that was called didn't work out for us. This is what I do know: Next time we're gonna win the game. I'll be there. I won't let you down."

Wilson mentions that he's been planning to do camps like this since he was in 11th grade (many of the kids are on scholarship). He tells his coaches that if they can positively impact one kid, it's all worth it. The camp winds down, but Wilson sees one more kid and a final teachable moment. A camper is walking off with a football. Wilson shouts at him across the field.

"Hey, that ball isn't yours. It stays here."

The boy answers in a small voice. "But I brought the ball with me."

Wilson flashes that politician smile and quickly changes gear.

"OK, bro. Hope you had a good time."

Russell Wilson stands about five feet 11, which is a nice height unless you're an NFL quarterback. In that case, you've grown up with a chip the size of an exurban deck on your shoulder. Naysayers used to get their words of doubt scribbled on Post-it notes that went on Wilson's wall. When he was a freshman at NC State, a coach suggested Wilson should switch to defensive back. Instead, Wilson went into the head coach's office and proclaimed he would be named the starting quarterback, become All-ACC and be drafted into the NFL. All those things came true. Even when Wilson slipped to the third round – the height thing again – he told a friend he knew he was going to become the starter.

It all happened just like Russell Wilson believed. Now he is consolidating his gains. Wilson's role model is Derek Jeter. Wilson was looking forward to having breakfast with him the morning after his camp. They share a passion to keep things with the public cheerful and vanilla. "Whether you're the Yankees shortstop or an NFL quarterback, eyes are always on you," says Wilson. "You have to handle things the right way."

Alas, Jeter calls an audible and postpones their breakfast. It is just as well. Wilson is hosting the Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Sports awards, and he spends the morning working with his motivation coach, Trevor Moawad. This is Wilson's first hosting assignment; he wants to get it just right. "We were just going through lines, and Russell was talking about nonverbal, para-verbal, extra-verbal and voice tone," says Moawad, who has worked with Olympic legend Michael Johnson and national champion football teams at the University of Alabama and Florida State.

We are on the floor of UCLA's Pauley Pavilion during the Nickelodeon rehearsals, and Moawad gazes up lovingly at Wilson, who is onstage talking about getting "slimed." "You don't usually see a 26-year-old with this kind of forethought," says Moawad. "He can anticipate things before they happen. He doesn't need trauma to prepare."

Wilson and Moawad didn't spend the off-season rehashing the interception; instead, they spent hours watching video medleys of Wilson's best plays. "A lot of people catastrophize things and fall off the mountaintop," Moawad says. "Russell doesn't."

Wilson asks for only one favor all day: a break around 5:00 so he can watch his girlfriend sing the national anthem at the baseball All-Star Game in Cincinnati. Just as the players are being announced, Wilson jogs through the catacombs of the pavilion to a room with a television. He whips out his phone and starts filming his girlfriend. She sounds beautiful, but Wilson notices a microdetail: "She's pulling at her earpiece. She can't hear herself."

It turns out to be true. Wilson Facetimes Ciara a few minutes later. "Baby, you did great, but I could tell you couldn't hear yourself."

Ciara's smile and voice crackle back. "I know, it went dead right before we went on. Did it sound OK?"

"You were great. Love you. See you tomorrow. Can't wait."

Back in his dressing room, Wilson flips through a rack of his wardrobe for the show and settles on an ugly blazer with a hundred safety pins. Wilson's style has evolved from dressing like a prosperous 45-year-old, but Rodgers, his agent, thinks the jacket is too much and threatens to burn it. Wilson sighs, settles in a chair and eats some fruit as he talks with Rodgers about various business projects, including the Good Man Brand clothing line, which will be edgy contemporary (purchases will include a card thanking the recipient for being a good man and noting that a $3 donation has been made to Wilson's charity in the recipient's name). "It's something I'd give my dad on Father's Day if he was still alive," says Wilson. "Just thanking him for setting a good example for me."

Another venture is slightly less altruistic. Wilson is an investor in Reliant Recovery Water, a $3-per-bottle concoction with nanobubbles and electrolytes that purportedly helps people recover quickly from workouts and, according to Wilson,

injury. He mentions a teammate whose knee healed miraculously, and then he shares his own testimonial.

"I banged my head during the Packers game in the playoffs, and the next day I was fine," says Wilson. "It was the water."

Rodgers offers a hasty interjection. "Well, we're not saying we have real medical proof."

But Wilson shakes his head, energized by the subject. He speaks with an evangelist's zeal.

"I know it works." His eyes brighten. "Soon you're going to be able to order it straight from Amazon."

Gridiron Star
Wilson rushed for 849 yards last year, with six TDs and an NFL-leading 7.2 yards per carry.

WILSON'S ÜBER-CONfidence served him well in an eventful offseason. There were the camps and a slew of buck-raking raids, ranging from ads for Bose and Microsoft to corporate speaking gigs. In the background, Rodgers was battling with the Seahawks over a new contract. Wilson was characteristically silent on the negotiations, except for a night I saw him at an Alaska Airlines soiree in Seattle (he's a brand ambassador). When the well-heeled crowd asked about the contract, Wilson answered jauntily, "[Seahawks owner] Paul Allen has to write the check."

At the time, Wilson was the NFL's greatest bargain, averaging $735,000 a year, less than most punters. Rodgers had already taken care of Wilson's long-term future, buying disability insurance for his client last year in case he suffered a career-ending injury. But the worry was for nothing. Allen ended up writing a check that will pay Wilson $87.6 million over the next four years, making him the NFL's second-highest-paid quarterback.

But, somehow, that wasn't the highlight of the summer. That would be Wilson's July 5th appearance at the Rock Church, a megachurch in San Diego. It was there that he dropped two bombs exponentially more interesting than anything he has ever said in an interview. First, he mentioned that his Super Bowl interception was all part of God's plan: "The play happens, I take three steps, and God says to me, 'I'm using you.' My sixth step, God says to me, 'I want to see how you respond, but more importantly I want [the world] to see how you respond.'"

The fact that Wilson's theological rationalization for the most infamous play in Super Bowl history got lost in the wash only speaks to the jaw-dropper he launched earlier in the conversation. Wilson met Ciara through a mutual friend in L.A. about six months earlier – and even that was preordained. Wilson had already told his friends before they met that he was going to end up with her. At the church, Wilson told the congregation and minister Miles McPherson, a former NFL defensive back, that he and Ciara were not doing the deed. God had speed-dialed Wilson again, this time backstage at his girlfriend's show.

"She was on tour," Wilson said, "and I was looking at her in the mirror 15 minutes before she went onstage. God said, 'I need you to lead her.'" Wilson smiled. "I was like, 'Really? Right now?'" Right away, Wilson asked her if she would be OK with taking all "that extra stuff off the table." She agreed.

"I knew God had brought me into her life to bless her and for her to bless me and to bless so many people with the impact that she has and I have," said Wilson. "He has anointed both of us – he's calling for us to do something miraculous and special." Wilson then quoted the book of Romans: "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

The announcement came as a surprise to Ciara, who was in London for a concert and had to parse out what had happened from the mentions on her Twitter feed. Soon after, she talked with Wilson and they got on the same page.

"The thing about Russell is he's real," Ciara tells me. "And that was a moment that got *real* real." She tells me he had no problem with her saucy video for "Dance Like We're Making Love," where she writhes in a see-through outfit. "We share similar views on pretty much everything. It's just superorganic."

BACKSTAGE AT PAULEY PAvilion is a happy mess an hour before the 5 p.m. show. Ciara is here, and despite the fact that she's making a 30-second appearance, her entourage matches Wilson's. The two are going to be dancing the Whip and Nae Nae with some kids. Wilson has decided he wants a costume change for every segment and is constantly in his boxer briefs, displaying a slight belly. He models a leather cap for Ciara. He tries it straight-ahead, backward and turned to the side. Ciara laughs and tsk-tsks. "You are not wearing it sideways," she says. "Not a good look for you."

Wilson has been practicing his dance moves for three days, having a choreographer tape him from various angles so he could see what he needed to work on. Ciara watches and nods approvingly.

"I told him that he and President Obama have a similar dancing style," Ciara tells me later. "I'm not sure what that means, but he's got a cute groove."

A TV blares *Scarface,* inexplicably one of Wilson's favorites – "The acting is phenomenal" – while an iPod shouts gospel music, Wilson's pregame sound of choice. Someone yells, "Twelve minutes!" but Wilson remains unruffled for the live broadcast. He insists that his hairstylist bring his kids backstage for a picture and then gathers everyone by the toilets for a prayer circle. They grasp hands.

"Lord, thank you for this day and your grace and mercy and love," he says. "Thank you for the opportunity you continue to give us. It's all about you, God. Tonight with all the stars and all the athletes and all the hoopla through all the energy, through all the icons, Father, guide me. The crowd, 10,000 kids here tonight, all the celebrities, all the people, all the parents, all the kids watching at home, just see me through. I am so grateful for your love and mercy."

Actually, that's a mere snippet. It's time for Wilson to take his first position. He reluctantly concludes, leaving just a few seconds for Ciara to lead the crew in a chant of "teamwork makes the dream work."

The broadcast goes live. Russell Wilson crushes it, as the bros like to say. He's strapped to a giant target and gets slimed. He throws footballs and slimes the kids. Wilson wears his cap backward and is only half a step behind Ciara's dance moves. The lone misstep of the show is a cautionary tale for Wilson on the responsibilities of fame. New York Knicks star and media mismanager Carmelo Anthony is here to try to set the *Guinness* record for high-fives in 30 seconds. The kids are lined up and the fix is in, but Antho-

OTTO GREULE JR./GETTY IMAGES

ny insists on running in a fedora and loafs through the line. After a commercial break, it is announced that Anthony, in fact, did not break the record.

"This is rigged," he moans.

After the show, everyone heads to the afterparty, which includes a VIP section where waiters bring you all the burgers and fries you can eat. On the way over, Wilson runs into Anthony, who is still carping about not setting the record, and Jeter, who was given a Legend award before getting slimed. Wilson and Jeter exchange a hug.

"You did great," says Jeter as cameras appear and flashes go off. "Keep doing what you're doing."

A hundred kids high on ketchup and fructose speed by. Russell Wilson looks the happiest.

WILSON AND I MEET the next week at the Seahawks facility in a Seattle suburb. The trip to the Northwest allowed me to catch a little of the Wilsonmania sweeping the town – every third kid seemed to be wearing his jersey. He did another camp out near Seattle-Tacoma Airport, but this one had 1,200 kids and three or four thousand parents and groupies in the bleachers at a sports complex. A man tried to scalp a spare pass as a kid cried tears of joy when Wilson brushed by him. Fifty-year-old men clapped along to Wilson leading jumping jacks.

> **I've overcome a lot, but I want to be defined by my present – and what's coming next.**

Wilson is on such a high that he's reluctant to let me harsh his vibe. On the Seahawks, the only star who shines as brightly as Wilson is Lynch, a dreadlocked running back who refuses to talk with the media. (At the Kids' Choice Sports awards, I introduced myself to Lynch, who had appeared in a skit, and he smiled and said, "OK!" Then he walked away.) Wilson is doing national commercials – he has turned down soda and fast-food ads because of their health issues – but Lynch is best known for local plumbing ads, such as a classic "Stop freakin', call Beacon" spot.

Last year, the Seahawks started 3-3. There were rumors of discord in the locker room largely surrounding troubled wide receiver Percy Harvin, whose relationship with Wilson was reportedly frosty at best. Harvin was eventually released, and Lynch tweeted, "Damn, they got my nigga." The subtext was that players thought Wilson was closer to management and head coach Pete Carroll than to his African-American teammates.

"Coach Carroll and I, we're both very similar in the sense of the positive mindset, and just believing things are going to work out if you continue to remain consistent," says Wilson. "I would rather be in a positive-flow state, and believe that things are going to work out, than linger in the negative and worry."

Wilson's closeness to Carroll and the front office – he has every staff member's birthday in his phone, according to *Sports Illustrated* – culminated in rumors that his teammates didn't think Wilson was black enough (a claim that star defensive back Richard Sherman vociferously denied).

"What does that even mean?" says Wilson, squirming in his chair at the Seahawks facility. "How are you defining 'black' or 'black enough'? I'm an African-American male with Native American blood. I didn't grow up with much. I've overcome a lot. I'm very, very proud of that history, but I'm also not going to just be defined by the history. I want to be defined by my present – and what's coming next."

Wilson then tells me that his childhood wasn't as gilded as some people think. He was on scholarship at Collegiate, a Richmond prep school; both his parents worked long hours, his mom as an ER nurse. "My family didn't have much, you know?" Later, he told me, "I went to a high-end school where kids would make fun of you." Wilson pauses. "Or not make fun of you – more so 'My family has this, my family has that,' and they just had it. I had to realize I had to earn my keep where a lot of guys I knew inherited money."

His brother elaborates. "The West End of Richmond was doctors, lawyers and business owners, old money. I don't know if we were on the bottom of the totem pole from a financial standpoint, but that's what it felt like."

Earlier, Wilson had told me a funny story about his dad coming to his games in mismatched shoes and socks. The creative outfits didn't seem to quite jibe with Wilson's other beatific stories about his button-down father, and suggested a man not entirely at home as a cog in the old-boy network. He eventually left corporate law to open a private practice.

"He moved to open his own firm, and there's challenges with that, 'cause it takes being a great attorney but also a great businessman," Harry told me, adding that his dad even stopped practicing law for a while.

Eventually, Harrison Wilson III's law license was suspended in 2002 for mistakes including missing deadlines and failing to pursue claims in a timely manner. For two years of Russell's teens, his father couldn't practice law, taking jobs at a gas station and a car dealership to help the family make ends meet.

"It's one of those things where you just move forward," Russell tells me during Seahawks training camp. "My dad was a hardworking guy. At one point he was working multiple jobs. He would do whatever it takes to help us go to school and help us survive. I'm grateful for my dad. I miss him every day."

It's a tiny real-life dent never mentioned in any of the other messianic stories written about Wilson by the football press. But the information provides a window into Wilson; he is trying to have the perfect life his father almost had. And that quest for perfection allows for no moments of weakness or doubt.

Wilson is a guy who visits hospitals more than any athlete I've known, and there is goodness in him rarely seen in twentysomething jocks. But he seems unable to admit vulnerability away from church. Even his story that God spoke to him after the Super Bowl interception and that he's never looked back strikes me as slightly off. In an essay for *The Players' Tribune*, Seahawks receiver Ricardo Lockette, Wilson's intended target, recently admitted to sleepless nights, and mentioned them to Wilson when they met in the off-season. Wilson said he had them too, something that not only makes him human but deviates from the superhero script.

"You can't get that Super Bowl back," says Wilson in a low monotone. "But when you get to the next one, what will you do because of that one? I've learned how to use the good and the bad from wins and losses, and use them for the next situation. It's a constant progression."

Wilson glances down at his phone. I can see Ciara is calling. "We connect so well, and we have the same vision," he says. I wonder if the hip-hop world is a bit of a stretch for the buttoned-up Wilson. He laughs. "No, it's a perfect fit, you know? Is it weird? No. It feels right."

It's time for Wilson to go. There's a flight to catch and financial investors waiting to hear his wisdom tomorrow in Colorado Springs. He begins to walk away and stops abruptly.

"Hey. Thanks for everything. You're the best, the absolute best."

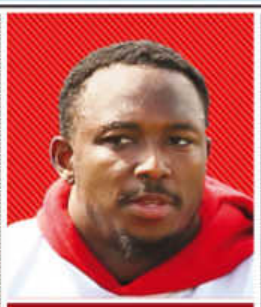
THE BAD NEWS BILLS

After being fired from the New York Jets at the end of last season, maverick coach Rex Ryan took over the Buffalo Bills – and immediately recruited a like-minded band of NFL misfits. With real talent and nothing left to lose, the Bills may actually be good this year (if they can survive the TMZ reports). Orgies! Beach brawls! Richie Incognito! "It certainly is a collection of characters," says former quarterback and ESPN analyst Ron Jaworski. "But choirboys don't win football games – you need some nasty SOBs." STEVE KNOPPER

Rex Ryan

COACH

In January, Ryan accepted the head coaching job in Buffalo and immediately made a crucial strategic decision – to change the ink on his bicep tattoo from New York green to Buffalo blue. From running with the bulls in Pamplona, Spain, to donning a wig and impersonating his twin brother at press conferences to admitting to thoughts about poisoning Peyton Manning, Ryan is the team's loose-cannon leader. "He's P.T. Barnum," Jaworski says, "the antithesis of Bill Belichick."



LeSean McCoy

RUNNING BACK

After the Eagles traded "Shady" McCoy to the Bills in March, the star running back retreated to Vegas and Instagrammed photos of himself with bikini babes. Then, he posted invitations to a "females only" party requiring guests to submit a photo and sign a confidentiality agreement. After the media uproar, McCoy canceled the event, stating it was "no weird orgy." "I did not get an invite," Ryan later said. "I'm a little disappointed."

Aaron Kromer

OFFENSIVE LINE COACH

Do not cross offensive line coach Kromer when beach-chair access is on the line. In July, Kromer, 48, and his son fought three boys who used his family's chairs on a beach in Walton County, Florida. The coach punched one of the boys in the face and threatened to kill his family if he reported him to the police, according to a sheriff's report. Kromer was arrested and spent an hour in jail; the Bills later suspended him for six games without pay.

Richie Incognito

OFFENSIVE LINEMAN

After his 2013 suspension for bullying Dolphins teammate Jonathan Martin – using racial slurs and joking about raping Martin's sister – Incognito joined the Bills. "There were a lot of things said and done that I wish I could change," he said – and then immediately made headlines again for posing shirtless with tailgaters at a Kenny Chesney concert in May. "Just peed next to Richie Incognito," a fan tweeted.

IK Enemkpali

LINEBACKER

In August, the 260-pound Jets linebacker broke starting quarterback Geno Smith's jaw, allegedly over a debt involving a $600 plane ticket (putting Smith out of action for up to eight weeks). The next day, the Bills claimed Enemkpali off waivers – even though the linebacker could have faced criminal charges. "I feel confident that he'll fit right in," Ryan said.

FROM TOP LEFT TO RIGHT: JOHN WAWROW /AP IMAGES; BILL WIPPERT/AP IMAGES; KELLEN MICAH/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES; BILL WIPPERT/AP IMAGES; AP IMAGES; MARCOS MESA SAM WORDLEY/SHUTTERSTOCK; IVONNE WIERINK/SHUTTERSTOCK; LESEAN MCCOY/INSTAGRAM; CHRISTOPHER POLK/GETTY IMAGES; SCISETTI ALFIO/SHUTTERSTOCK

The Secrets of an NFL Locker Room

A former professional punter on the players' last sanctuary

What the average fan never seems to understand is that out on the field, during the interviews we give, we're the uniform mouthing the same cliché. Those in charge don't want you to be you. They want you to be the product – and sneaker sales cross political lines. But inside the locker room? We're human beings talking about the same things as everyone else – because just like everyone else, we have to pass the time when we're not working.

"What do you think about Obama? We finally got a black president!"

"Hey, did you see this sweet thing on YouTube? It's called 'Gangnam Style.'"

"Man, these fucking taxes fucking suck. Obama fucking sucks. Fuck."

"…So there I was, two fingers deep, and in walks her friend…."

In an NFL locker room, newly minted millionaires from all different backgrounds rub shoulders every day, none of whom are easily categorized into a single box, save one: We can play the game. We talk about skits on *Saturday Night Live*, the difference between hip-hop and jive, baby sitters and bassinets and strippers. We contemplate the virtues of Vonnegut in between slapping down dominoes, and it's nothing we're ever surprised to hear because the conversations simply mask what we're really thinking.

"My head's still ringing. Ha ha. Better keep fooling them."

"Shit, man, I drank too much again last night. Who can cover me for some of these reps?"

"My girl keeps calling, and this other girl keeps calling. Fuck."

"It's torn. I wonder if they're gonna find someone new?"

Every one of us in there recognizes, although it is almost never voiced, that our job is not just a job. It is the *only* job like it, and it can be taken away in an instant. One bad game. A twist of the knee. One mistimed step. Everything that we've worked for can instantly vanish – sending us back to a life of ignoble anonymity.

No more of the good, the bad, the strange. No more pranks, freezing someone's clothes to their car, or blowing an air horn into the storage closet where it's easy to sneak a nap. No more sharing a bus with domestic abusers, unable to refuse to associate with them because that's not your choice to make. No more watching someone get suspended four games for taking penis-enlargement pills. No more 40-pound tape balls, crafted over the course of years of meetings.

When you hear a retired player say, "The only thing I miss is the locker room," it's the truth. Fortune and fame were nice, but it was the people who made the game worthwhile. We can commiserate at reunions, try to catch up via text and phone, but it's not the same. It'll never be the same, because for us, the dream is over – and there's no going back.

CHRIS KLUWE

The Game's Major New Rule

Moving the extra point back 15 yards changes everything

Say goodbye to the most ridiculous play in sports: the extra point from the two-yard line, which kickers converted more than 99 percent of the time. "It is completely boring," says former placekicker Gary Anderson. "The fans go to the restroom."

This season, the NFL moved the kick to the 15-yard line, hoping to encourage teams to go for the two-point conversion – and make the game more dramatic. (The rule also allows defensive players to return blocked kicks and turnovers for two-point safeties.)

Yet it's unclear how the change will play out. The new extra-point attempts will be a total of 33 yards; kickers made 92.8 percent from that distance over the past five seasons. So now coaches will have to consider new math: Will dropping the extra-point probability prompt them to try for a conversion play they make only 48 percent of the time? "It adds another level of strategy," Anderson says.

STEVE KNOPPER

FROM TOP: PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY SEAN MCCABE, BASED ON A PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL ZAGARIS/SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS/GETTY IMAGES; ILLUSTRATION BY TODD DETWILER

Top 5 Off-Season Disasters

Forget rock & roll: Pro football has had a monopoly on bad behavior in 2015

Forget Deflategate – actual crimes and tabloid-worthy blunders were made this past off-season. All in all, 23 players have been arrested or reprimanded this year. "It's always been guys maybe having a good time and getting high," says Michael Irvin, a Hall of Fame wide receiver and NFL Network analyst who made headlines for drug charges in the Nineties. "But what we're dealing with lately has been horrific."

Jason Pierre-Paul and C.J. Wilson

DISASTER Both the New York Giants defensive end and the Tampa Bay Bucs cornerback blew off fingers with fireworks on July 4th. Pierre-Paul had his right index finger amputated; Wilson had two fingers severed while holding fireworks that exploded instead of rocketing skyward.

STATUS Pierre-Paul lost his $60 million long-term contract offer. Wilson announced his retirement after two seasons in the NFL.

Joseph Randle

DISASTER In 2014, the Dallas Cowboys running back was nabbed for shoplifting Polo underwear and Gucci cologne from a mall. In February, he was arrested for marijuana possession.

STATUS Randle was fined $29,000 by the Cowboys – and then became a spokesman for the online underwear company MeUndies.

La'el Collins

DISASTER Three days before signing with the Cowboys, the offensive lineman was questioned in the double homicide of his pregnant 29-year-old ex-girlfriend.

STATUS A paternity test proved Collins was not the father; police cleared him of suspicion. A month later, he was accused of stiffing a prostitute named "Throatzilla."

Aldon Smith

DISASTER Since 2011, the San Francisco 49ers Pro Bowl linebacker has either been arrested for or charged with felony gun offenses, DUIs, a bomb threat at LAX and a nine-game suspension for violating league substance-abuse policies. But the 49ers held off on releasing Smith until August – after he was arrested for a hit-and-run and vandalism while driving under the influence.

STATUS Smith has denied driving while intoxicated. "Justice will be served, the truth will come out," he said in August.

Sheldon Richardson

DISASTER In July, weeks after being suspended for failing a drug test, the New York Jets Pro Bowl defensive lineman was arrested in a St. Louis suburb for driving his 2014 Bentley 143 mph while evading police. The car reeked of marijuana, and he was caught with a loaded handgun and three family members, one of whom was 12.

STATUS Richardson is still with the Jets – and due in court in October. "That was just one bad night," he said in July. "I thought it would be fun to show my family members something." HUNTER ATKINS

Is John Urschel's Beautiful Mind at Risk?

In August, at the Baltimore Ravens training camp, offensive lineman John Urschel suffered a concussion – sparking one of the most interesting stories in the ongoing debate over head trauma in the NFL. While every NFL player has plenty to lose from head trauma, Urschel is unique: He's the only player who stands to ruin his sideline career, as an internationally recognized mathematician. This past spring, after helping the Ravens to the playoffs, he published a paper, "A Cascadic Multigrid Algorithm for Computing the Fiedler Vector of Graph Laplacians," in an academic journal. "It's very rare for your thesis to be publishable," says Penn State math professor Ludmil Zikatanov. "The journal would be a very nice place to publish when you're *faculty* – let alone a student."

Teaching trig at Penn State in 2013

Urschel's math prowess has made him a star – he tweets as @MathMeetsFball – while stirring controversy: Why would a math genius risk his talent in favor of the game? In an essay for *The Players' Tribune*, Urschel wrote, "Objectively, I shouldn't." He claims he isn't playing for money – he says he lives on $25,000 a year – or status. The allure is primal. "I love hitting people," he wrote. "This is a feeling I'm (for lack of a better word) addicted to." As a result, he still plans to play this season – underscoring the murkiness of the debate on head trauma. Even for players who now recognize the game's risks, the highs of being a pro football player are hard to replace. "I've fallen in love with the sport," Urschel says. "Right now, not playing football isn't an option for me." REEVES WIEDEMAN

TOP, FROM LEFT: SBMF/FAMEFLYNET PICTURES; RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES; JULIO CORTEZ/AP IMAGES; O'FALLON POLICE DEPARTMENT; SANTA CLARA POLICE DEPARTMENT. BOTTOM: CHRIS DUNN/^YORK DAILY RECORD^/^SUNDAY NEWS^/AP IMAGES

Madden & Me

How the No. 1 football video game took over my life **By David Amsden**

A few years ago, in what is either one of the most significant or pathetic accomplishments of my adult life, I became one of the world's best players of Madden NFL on the Xbox. I know this because Madden, a monstrously popular video game that has sold more than 100 million copies in its 27-year history, features a "leader board" on which the game's nearly 2 million online players can see where they rank in comparison to the competition. A devilish feature, this. For a thirtysomething adult with a Type A personality and some unaddressed life issues – i.e., me – it transforms Madden from an escapist pastime into another stage on which to prove your self-worth. By the release of Madden 10, in 2009, I was consistently ranked in the top 100 players online, and by Madden 13, I was a regular presence in the top 10. Unlike an actual NFL player, I can look back on my triumphs with brain and joints intact; yet some part of me will forever be lost, recovering from the psychological toll sustained on a pixilated field.

"Some guys get pretty crazy with the online play," Kolbe Launchbaugh, one of Madden's creative directors, tells me when I ask him about the engrossing online gaming subculture that he is partially responsible for creating – one that has evolved over the years into an ancillary, yearlong "season" that its most hardcore participants take as seriously as that of the real NFL. Estimating that hundreds of millions of online matches are played yearly, Launchbaugh adds, "We have guys on here who play enough games to occupy two full-time jobs."

He is, unknowingly, describing what happened to me when I decided to wade into the peculiar and turbulent waters of online gaming. At first, all I did was lose my Madden matches, which unfold a bit like games of chess, albeit ones requiring the mental acuity of Peyton Manning and the hand-eye wizardry of David Blaine. An adult with a healthier disposition would have stopped playing after a few attempts, but my deeply entrenched distaste for losing and my manic fixation on winning are among my most dominant personality traits – far more crucial to any success I've had as a writer, for instance, than that ephemeral thing referred to as "talent." All of which is to say: I played and played (and played and played) until I could hold my own. I got decent, able to "read" and react to defensive schemes I'd long failed to understand while merely watching NFL games. Then I got good. Then something grim happened: Madden overtook my life.

During these years, if you saw me out in New York, you would have encountered a well-dressed, sophisticated-enough writer type, a regular at book parties, fluent in the language of art galleries and small-plates restaurants. I dated three wonderful women. I had an agent, a deal for a second book, some projects germinating in Hollywood. But if you installed a hidden camera in my apartment, you would have seen the feral-eyed maniac known to fellow Madden junkies by the gamer tag "brooklyn1979." After trying to squeeze in a productive hour or two of writing in the mornings, I'd make the shame-inducing transition to my Danish modern couch, where I'd often remain for the rest of the day, inhaling a pack of cigarettes while playing ranked games of Madden and rising only to punch holes in the plaster walls of my well-appointed home. Though I never entered the high-octane universe of tournament play or the shadow world where games are played for money in quasi-legal betting forums, my dedication to climbing the leader board quickly verged on the diabolical. At my peak (or, looking back, my nadir), I was playing about 2,000 online games a year, which, at an average of 40 minutes per game, meant that I was spending about two full months a year playing Madden. Because I made the mistake of including my birth year in my gamer tag, many of my foes took to berating me as a "30 year old welfare virgin living in momma's basement," to quote one emblematic dig. Once, when I tried to explain that I was in fact "a writer of books who lives alone in Brooklyn," my opponent, who described himself as "a 15 yr old who gets mad hoes," was ready with a comeback: "Brooklyn and books are stupid." That I was genuinely offended goes a long way toward explaining just how important validation in Madden's online community had become.

Me: You know hoes are garden tools?

Him: Damn you really ARE stupid!

Keeping the world of David Amsden, urbane writer, separate from that of brooklyn1979, merciless Madden star, became an exceedingly difficult tightrope walk. I struggled to focus on calls with editors, for instance, because while on the phone I'd be trying to stop the crossing pattern of one of my regular sparring partners on the virtual NFL gridiron.

Illustration by Tomer Hanuka

Hell, in a darkly surreal moment, I once conducted a long interview with Tom Brady while – wait for it – *playing against the Patriots in Madden*. My output as a writer, needless to say, suffered: The second book went unwritten, and the movie work dried up, which only infused my mission to climb Madden's leader board with a misguided sense of urgency. And much as I tried to keep my romantic relationships insulated from my Madden obsession, the game found ways to seep in. My girlfriend would take a shower, only to emerge to find me sneaking a match, screaming vulgarities into my headset ("Lil' bitch, I'm-a cut you *down* if you keep tryin' that bullshit!"), which is not a sight that a woman who believes herself to be dating a cultured writer in New York finds remotely seductive. I started thinking of people I knew only by their gamer tags with as much reality as I did the three-dimensional people in my life, who I was seeing less and less. A few years ago, in an attempt to rationalize my habit, I persuaded another publication to commission an essay not unlike this one. But it never got written. I chose, instead, to just play Madden.

In a particularly embarrassing highlight from this low point in my life, I got into a heated postgame spat with a player I had just beaten. This was not uncommon. As brooklyn1979, I would sit with a computer next to me while I played, logged in to my Xbox account, the better to allow me to send antagonistic notes to players while our games were in progress. I had countless times gone so far as to falsely tell "glitchers" (those who relied on manipulating the game's AI rather than playing "clean") that I had traced their IP address to their actual home, and would be at their door shortly to "settle this in person." Anyway, on this occasion my trash-talking exchange culminated with my opponent sending me the following threat*: im gonna have kimbo slice shove his big black dick up ur ass and make it come out ur mouth u stupid fuck*. Amused, I took a photo of the screen with my phone so I could e-mail it to a friend named Fred, one of the few people to whom I had confessed the depths of my Madden vertigo. The trouble is that, in my life as a journalist, I was also in the process of pursuing an interview with Tom Freston, one of the founders of MTV, about his life since being forced out as the CEO of Viacom, the multinational media giant encompassing CBS and Paramount. Typing "Fre" into my overly intelligent smartphone, however, triggered Freston's e-mail over my friend Fred's, and before I realized what was happening I sent one of the most powerful men in media a message informing him of "my" plan to enlist a mixed-martial-arts fighter to defile him in one of the most heinous and racially insensitive ways imaginable. (Mr. Freston, if you happen to be reading this, please accept my belated apology.)

During my call with Launchbaugh, I ask if he ever feels uneasy knowing that the game has this effect on people around the world. "There's a little bit of guilt," he says with a laugh. "But all in all, we love it! Our measure of success is how much we can keep people like you playing the game through the year." Fair enough. One thing that becomes clear in our discussion is that someone with my habit is an extreme outlier in the Madden universe: one of a few dozen, not millions, which puts my "success" in less heroic perspective. Had I known this a few years earlier, who knows? Maybe I would have seen Madden for what it was: a way of regressing into childhood at the undeniable dawn of adulthood.

> **At my peak, I was playing about 2,000 online games a year, the equivalent of two full months of my life.**

Stories of addiction tend to follow a certain arc: pleasure-seeking giving way to self-destruction, leading the protagonist to hit "rock bottom" before climbing out of the darkness. Mine does not fit so neatly into that narrative. As I talk to one of the game's developers, hearing about the new features in this month's release of Madden 16, I find myself itching to test-drive the game, reminded of one of the franchise's singular attributes: the way it enhances an NFL fan's understanding of the professional game, rendering the offensive and defensive schemes faced by actual NFL players comprehensible.

Thing is, I no longer have a gaming console. Two and a half years ago, the woman I loved left me. While the breakup had nothing to do with Madden, I'm sure my cause was not advanced by the fact that I had become more tuned in to completing sideline passes in Cover 2 than to her emotional needs. Thrown into a tailspin, I took a five-day trip to New Orleans and never left. I have no Xbox down here in the swamps, and as much as my chat with Madden's developer makes me momentarily reconsider buying one, I know where it can lead.

Is Fantasy Football Changing the NFL?

The online game's impact on the league

Since its rise in the Nineties, fantasy football has grown into an $11 billion industry – completely altering how fans watch the game. From the Red Zone channel to the NFL Network's extensive fantasy coverage, fans are obsessively tracking player stats to get an edge in their office-pool leagues. Alongside the ascent of fantasy – a stats-heavy game that rewards big offensive numbers – the NFL has noticeably changed its rules to become a passing league: The past five seasons have been the most prolific passing years on record. Which begs a question: Is fantasy running the NFL these days?

"I don't think that you can sit in the competition committee meeting with Jeff Fisher, Bill Belichick or whoever and tell them to change the rules to enhance fantasy football," says former quarterback and current CBS game-day analyst Boomer Esiason. "But I think it's an unintended consequence that the rule changes have impacted the advent of fantasy football – no question." Nathan Zegura, a former McKinsey consultant who became a pro fantasy expert and now works for the Cleveland Browns, agrees. "The rule changes have been very much pro-offense, so maybe on a subconscious level, fantasy has impacted the game," he says. "It's just hard to separate that from the fact that people like watching offensive football games." Regardless, Zegura has seen firsthand that fantasy has changed how teams evaluate players: "Some of the stats you see – like yards per target and air yards per pass – were developed for fantasy. And they're now being used to help judge prospective free agents."

KEVIN LINCOLN

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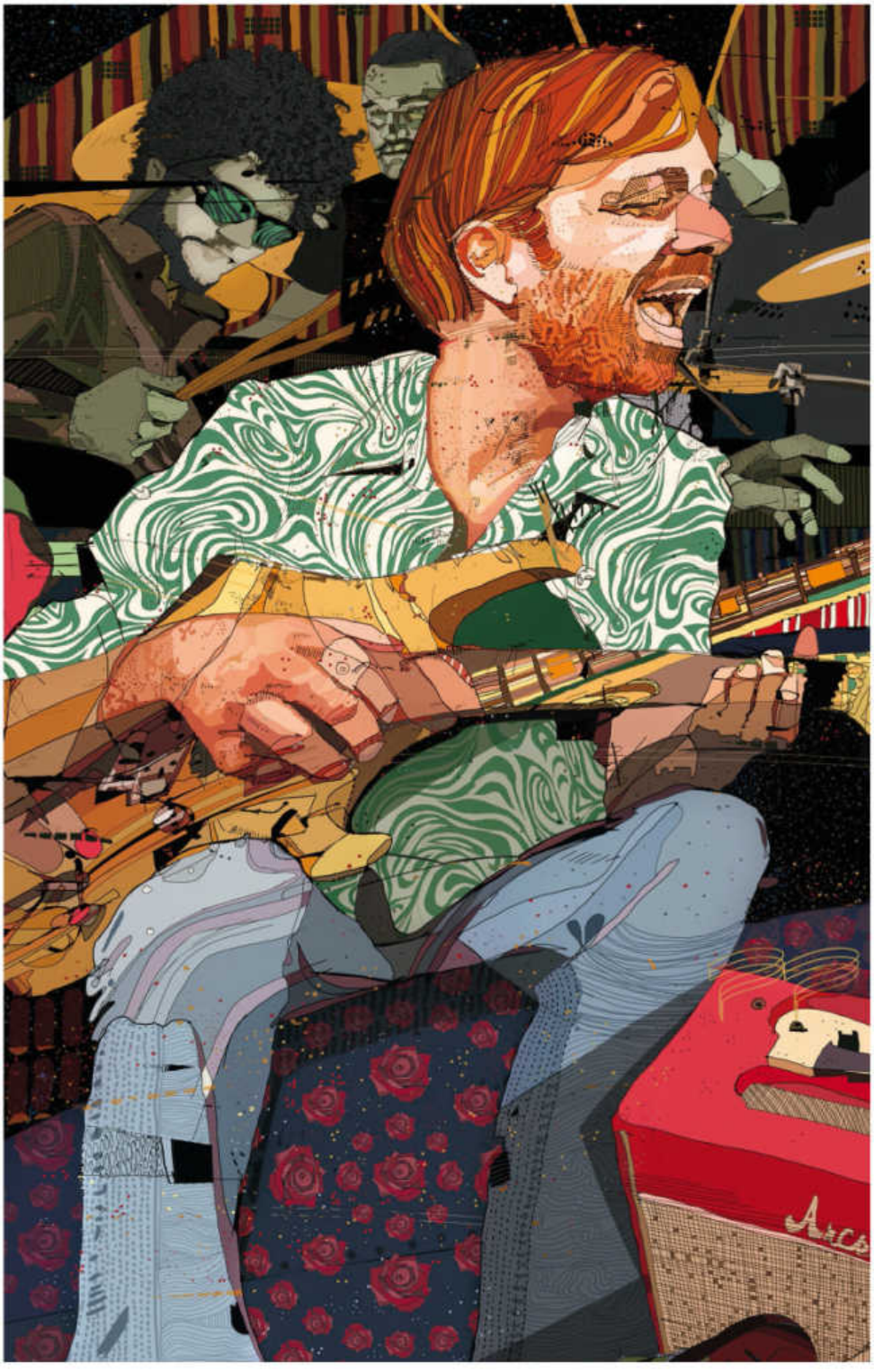
A Black Key's Deep New Groove



Dan Auerbach explores funk, psychedelia and soul on a surprisingly rewarding side project

The Arcs

Yours, Dreamily, Nonesuch

★★★★

BY DAVID FRICKE

"I'm old enough to know the game/But pushing buttons now is all that keeps me sane," Dan Auerbach sings in "Outta My Mind," the opening jolt on this strange, seductive album, through a spooky melange of spaghetti-Western guitars, funk drumming and oily reverb. The first line is plain enough: Auerbach, 36, has been a rock star for more than a third of his life, as the singer-guitarist-songwriter of the modern-blues duo the Black Keys. The second explains why Auerbach – a side-project fiend, with his own Nashville studio, who's produced records for acts like Dr. John and Lana Del Rey – was compelled to form another new band. When the game gets weird, work is salvation. "Outta my mind," he admits in the chorus, "but I made it."

For Auerbach, the Arcs, a quintet, are an extended family that gives him room to stretch out. Multi-instrumentalist Leon Michels is a busy figure on New York's neo-soul scene: He's played horns in the Menahan Street Band and reinterpreted the Wu-Tang Clan with his own group, El Michels Affair, and toured with the Black Keys in 2010. Drummer Richard Swift, from the Shins, is also a touring musician for the Keys. Auerbach wrote most of the 14 songs on *Yours, Dream-*

Illustration by Tony Rodriguez

ily, with Michels, but much of the album's loopy noir – the psychedelic-Curtis Mayfield pathos of "Stay in My Corner"; the Afro-jazz streaks in "Velvet Ditch"; the dark crunch of "The Arc" – wouldn't have been out of place, tightened and with less reverb, on the Black Keys' last album, 2014's adventurous *Turn Blue*.

Yours, Dreamily, takes what Auerbach does at his best, in and out of the Keys – confessional, texturally enriched blues propelled with garage-rock force – and adds a riveting jump in eccentricity. The crusty, Mellotron-like keyboard running through the paranoid hip-hop march "Put a Flower in Your Pocket" suggests a blaxploitation soundtrack scored by King Crimson. "Cold Companion" is a spare, lurching walk with bone-dry guitars and Auerbach's rap-cadence singing until the chorus, which lights up with a sly harmony-vocal spin on the Eagles' "Witchy Woman."

The roaming haste with which the Arcs made this album – recording over two weeks in four studios – shows in places, mostly the lyrics. "Rosie (Ooh La La)" is a promising trip-hop trifle without much song. A rhyme like "The milk inside the fridge, it turned/The bridge between us, it burned," in "Everything You Do (You Do for You)" suggests the kind of first-thought songwriting found on Neil Young's lesser records.

But two of the best things about the Arcs' first album come near the end. In the bleak R&B beauty "Chains of Love," Auerbach hands the chorus to the female singers Mariachi Flor de Toloache, who haunt the space behind the beat and spindly guitars like a ghostly Shangri-Las. And in the stately finish, "Searching the Blue," Auerbach returns to the urgency that drives him to start more bands and make records like this. "Is anything we do ever gonna last?" he sings. You'll never know unless you press "record."

LISTEN NOW!
Hear key tracks from these albums at **RollingStone.com/albums**.

House party: Legrand and Scally

A Dream You Won't Want to Wake Up From

Beach House go deeper into their hazy, lovely indie-pop sound on their enthralling fifth album

Beach House *Depression Cherry* Sub Pop ★★★½

Over four alluring albums, Beach House have managed the rare trick of evoking bliss and loss in equal strength. Guitarist Alex Scally's extravagant melodies bloom slowly over grooves that pulse like waves; singer Victoria Legrand's vocals echo Fleetwood Mac's lush folk rock, Cocteau Twins' surreal dreams and Nico's spooky drama. The Baltimore duo's fifth album sticks to that signature sound, and go figure: A formula that might seem limiting feels instead like it can contain entire worlds.

Depression Cherry opens on a sustained organ chord and crisp cymbal pattern, the image of a longhaired couple after midnight, and Legrand beckoning the listener inside. "There's a place I want to take you," she sings, over a subtle beat that builds toward a pop crescendo that never quite comes. Who needs it to? Foreplay this good is an end unto itself. Throughout the album, Legrand's lyrics conjure vivid experience. "Sparks" considers a brilliant hallucination that cruelly disappears – but which it might be possible to reclaim through love, or art. "From my mouth to yours," she sings amid Scally's guitar shudders. The surprise: "Days of Candy," with its Beach Boys-style chorale and Legrand repeating, "I know it comes too soon." She surely means something bigger, but if "it" meant only the end of this gorgeous 45-minute album, the singer would still be spot on. **WILL HERMES**

KEY TRACKS: "Sparks," "Days of Candy"

Maddie & Tae

Start Here Big Machine/Republic
★★★½

Charming duo offer feminist country with hooks and wit

A country duo who got together in their teens, Madison Marlow and Taylor Dye topped the country charts last year with "Girl in a Country Song," a sly shot at Nashville sexism in the era of the bro. Their first studio album offers more variations on that theme – check the hooky "Shut Up and Fish," about a horndog city dude who ruins a trip to the lake by "gettin' closer, slidin' over, crowdin' up my castin' shoulder." Even when the sentiments are more traditional, though, Maddie & Tae sound tough-minded and stout-hearted. On the acoustic ballad "After the Storm Blows Through," they offer shelter to a troubled guy who sounds like he deserves it – at least as boys in country songs go. **JON DOLAN**

The Libertines

Anthems for Doomed Youth Harvest
★★★½

Princes of debauchery return, remind us why they're great

In the early 2000s, the Libertines soaked up comparisons to Oasis and the Strokes, while singer-guitarist Pete Doherty hoovered all the drugs in London. With those days behind them, the Libs have returned for their first LP since 2004, full of sharp garage slop, glam anthems, Waterloo sunburn and loads of references to their collapse ("Woke up again to my evil twin/The mirror is fucking ugly, and I'm tired of looking at him," co-frontman Carl Barât sings on "Gunga Din"). Whatever personal clarity they've attained has done nothing to dilute their music's heroic wastedness. They still nail the accidentally poignant sound of grasping for heaven while falling from a window. **JON DOLAN**

SHAWN BRACKBILL

Destroyer

Poison Season Merge

★★★½

Rock eccentric takes wryly brilliant shuffle down E Street

Destroyer's Dan Bejar is one of indie rock's most inventive wild cards. His last album, 2011's excellent *Kaputt*, was an absurdist take on early-Eighties yacht pop. His latest asks a question: What if the David Bowie of *Space Oddity* and the Bruce Springsteen of *The Wild, the Innocent & the E Street Shuffle* were the same person? Bejar stacks rainy-New York sax magic, sad-astronaut strings and hippie jazzbo grooving to make songs that are as wryly hilarious as they are weirdly affecting. The peak is "Times Square," a New York serenade that begins, "Jesus is beside himself/Jacob's in a state of decimation," and only gets more mythic from there. **JON DOLAN**

Foals

What Went Down Warner Bros.

★★★★

British band unleashes the beast within on its best album yet

U.K. art rockers Foals specialize in arena-size intricacy – anthemic art pop rich with detailed guitar churn, latticed beats and luminous electronics. Their fourth and best album plays up a dark, bracing urgency, especially on the explosive title track, where Yannis Philippakis hollers over low-slung, fuzzed-out riffing and high-octane drum pummel. Songs like "Snake Oil" add funk stomp and blues-metal muscle, suggesting Foals' Oxford, England, homeys Radiohead at their most visceral. "Now that we're older/ The future is colder," Philippakis sings on "A Knife in the Ocean," and every song here spins something epic out of that dread. **JON DOLAN**

Yo La Tengo

Stuff Like That There Matador

★★★½

Indie-rock standard bearers chill out on a mostly covers set

The Velvet Underground are a durable rock-band model, one that Hoboken's Yo La Tengo have plumbed over 14 LPs, suggesting where that noisy, lyrical, short-lived group might've gone. The latest is lean, hushed and mostly covers, including a take on Yo La's own "The Ballad of Red Buckets." Georgia Hubley treats the Cure's "Friday I'm in Love" like a fireside singalong; "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" follows Hank Williams' original through Al Green's version with a nod to the Everly Brothers. Interpreting the Parliaments, the Lovin' Spoonful and Sun Ra, guitars shimmering, Yo La Tengo are music-geek lifers you can take home to Mom. **WILL HERMES**

Against Me!

23 Live Sex Acts

Total Treble/INGrooves

★★★

Stellar punk crew finds fresh anger on ferocious concert LP

Against Me!'s most recent LP, 2014's *Transgender Dysphoria Blues*, was the punk group's first since frontwoman Laura Jane Grace came out as transgender, and songs like "True Trans Soul Rebel" sounded like cries of freedom. On *23 Live Sex Acts* – recorded on various dates of the band's tour last year – they ring even louder. Grace updates the lyrics to 2005's "Pretty Girls (the Mover)" to address her identity, and interrupts 2007's "New Wave" to castigate a security guard for ejecting a fan: "If he leaves, you have to get up here and play guitar!" It's a loose affair, but Grace's sheer exuberance keeps it exciting. **KORY GROW**

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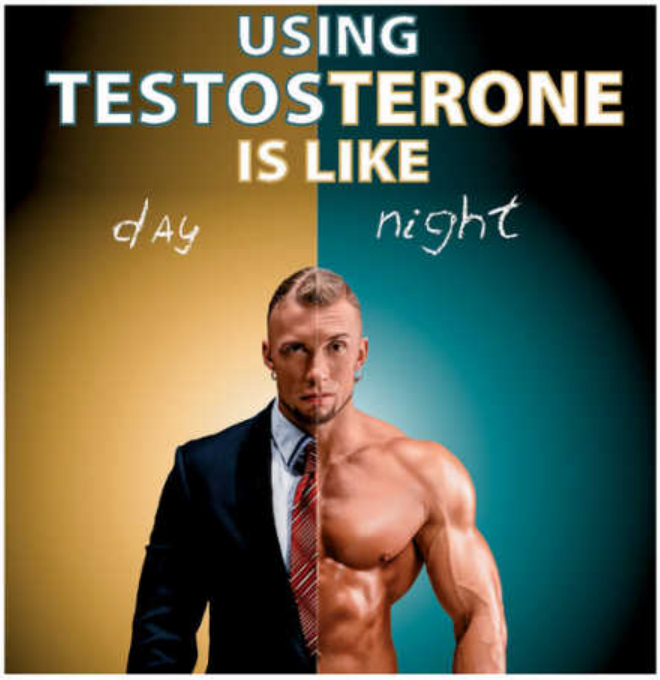

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Iron Maiden

The Book of Souls BMG

★★★½

British metal gods keep raising hell on a wild double album

Metal's most fanciful band has gilded its 16th LP with the usual tales of kings, battles and foolhardy missions to the sky – but while those topics might sound like old hat, the veteran Brits indulge their whims without ever getting tiresome. Their three guitarists wield an endless arsenal of galloping riffs and wild solos on the singalong-ready "The Red and the Black" and the urgent "Death or Glory." What's most impressive is how vocalist Bruce Dickinson, who recently survived a tongue-cancer scare, still sounds like a cross between an air-raid siren and Maria Callas. And tracks like the 18-minute closer, "Empire of the Clouds," ensure that these guys will never be short on ambition. **KORY GROW**

Ultimate Painting

Green Lanes Trouble in Mind

★★★

Groovy guitar dreams from a London duo that love the Dead

Now here's a rock & roll paradox for you: a sunshine-daydream guitar album from the gloomy streets of East London. Ultimate Painting are two British dudes with their own thriving indie bands – Mazes' Jack Cooper and Veronica Falls' James Hoare. Together they come up with a deliciously woozy guitar rush, buzzing in the style of the Velvets or the Clean, yet infused by the spirit of the Grateful Dead, as you can guess from titles like "Two From the Vault." The songs don't need much time to create a mood – none even reach the four-minute mark – but they all kick in, from the psychedelic late-night babble of "Woken by Noises" and "Kodiak" to the wispy stoner ballad "Out in the Cold." **ROB SHEFFIELD**

KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE

UPDATE: POP

Carly Rae Jepsen Grows Up, Maybe

Carly Rae Jepsen *Emotion*

Schoolboy/Interscope ★★★½

Carly Rae Jepsen is looking for more than a one-song stand. A barrage of tracks has preceded the release of her second U.S. album, suggesting she's desperate to prove that 2012's smash "Call Me Maybe" was no accident. And *Emotion* is a pop master class, with Swedish song doctors alongside alt-rockers gone pro (Vampire Weekend's Rostam Batmanglij, Blood Orange's Devonte Hynes). But whether the songs are about lust ("Run Away With Me") or heartbreak ("Boy Problems"), the default mode is triumph. Almost every track is like a bouncy castle: fun, certainly, but not made for long-term stays. **JOE LEVY**

Good Times in 'Badlands'

Halsey *Badlands* Astralwerks ★★★½

Images on this 20-year-old New Yorker's debut flicker by like broadcasts from a battlefield or texts from a party: the man with his hands around a pretty girl's throat, the father putting his fist through a wall when his daughter sneaks off to meet someone in the city. The music recalls Lorde or Rihanna heard from across a suburban football field, and it wears out faster than the lyrics – which vibrate with the twists and turns of a young woman taking command of her body, mind, and then the world. **J.L.**

A New Diva in the Making

Tori Kelly *Unbreakable Smile*

Capitol ★★½

Tori Kelly is a cross between Lea Michele on *Glee* and Ariana Grande in world-domination mode: a power singer torn between girl-with-a-guitar authenticity and diva-with-six-inch-heels ascension. Her debut is full of startlingly human pop – check "Talk," with a shifting groove courtesy of Frank Ocean producer Malay. But only a choir geek will suffer through the self-empowerment lectures that surround the highs. Next time: less guitar, higher heels. **J.L.**

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(1) Chewbacca and Ford in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens.* **(2)** Craig is again 007 in *Spectre.* **(3)** DiCaprio takes aim in *The Revenant.* **(4)** Lawrence leads her troops in *The Hunger Games.*

20 Must-Sees for Fall

Sifting through the crap to find epic thrills and Academy gold By Peter Travers

Black Mass
SEPTEMBER 18TH

JOHNNY DEPP KICKS OFF the fall season on a high with a scary tour de force as Whitey Bulger, the Boston gangster convicted in 2013 on 11 counts of murder. "I'm very excited to slide into that skin," says Depp, 52, who also slides into the awards game after career setbacks (*The Lone Ranger, Transcendence, Mortdecai*). Depp just kills it in this one.

Sicario
SEPTEMBER 18TH

IN MEXICO, THE TITLE means "hitman." The movie, a *Traffic*-like stunner that spins your head around, delivers something sensationally exciting. Emily Blunt is dynamite as a by-the-book FBI agent caught up in a morally shady drug operation, led by a shifty CIA agent (Josh Brolin) and a mercenary (Benicio Del Toro). "She's put to the test in a way she never has been," says Blunt. Ditto the audience. Hang on.

The Walk
SEPTEMBER 30TH

JOSEPH GORDON-LEVITT EXcels as an ardent, acrobatic Philippe Petit before, during and after the Frenchman took that daredevil walk on a steel wire between the World Trade Center towers on August 7th, 1974. Better yet, director Robert Zemeckis, shooting in vertiginous 3D, puts you up there with him and oh, baby, wow.

The Martian
OCTOBER 2ND

DIRECTOR RIDLEY SCOTT told Matt Damon, who was hedging about doing *The Martian* so soon after *Interstellar*, "This is going to be fucking fun." Guess what? It is. In Scott's take on Andy Weir's bestseller, Damon is an astronaut stranded on Mars when his crew heads back to Earth thinking him dead. Don't fret about existential dread – it's a blast.

Legend
OCTOBER 2ND

"IT'S A HELL OF A CHALlenge," says Tom Hardy. That's an understatement. In this electrifying true-crime story, Hardy plays 1960s London gangster Reggie Kray and his gay twin, Ronald. They're both total psychos, but in different ways. Hardy takes more effing risks than anyone since Daniel Day-Lewis. You can't tear your eyes away from him.

Pan OCTOBER 9TH

AFTER HATE-WATCHING THE live TV version of *Peter Pan,* I'd had it with that crowing brat. But director Joe Wright (*Adaptation*) takes a different angle as Pan (Levi Miller) first arrives in Neverland, meets Hook (Garrett Hedlund) and Tiger Lily (Rooney Mara) and mixes it up with the pirate Blackbeard (Hugh Jackman). Wright, whose parents ran a puppet theater, has a thing for fantasy and flying without a net: "It felt

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: © LUCASFILM 2015; JONATHAN OLLEY/COLUMBIA PICTURES; KIMBERLEY FRENCH; MURRAY CLOSE

like, 'What's the stupidest possible idea? Let's do that one.'"

Bridge of Spies
OCTOBER 16TH

TALK ABOUT HAVING ALL the elements: a Cold War thriller directed by Steven Spielberg, written by the Coen brothers and starring Tom Hanks as the lawyer recruited by the CIA to defend a Soviet spy (Mark Rylance) in a trade for captured American U-2 pilot Gary Powers. Spielberg notes that his father was visiting Russia at the time of the U-2 incident. For him, this one's personal.

Crimson Peak
OCTOBER 16TH

WHEN GUILLERMO DEL TORO (*Pan's Labyrinth*) does a haunted-house movie, you better believe it will keep you up nights. "It's violent and kinky," Del Toro warns. Things get Gothic fast when a dashing 19th-century aristocrat (Tom Hiddleston) takes his London bride (Mia Wasikowska) to live in his spooked mansion. For company, she has his sibling (Jessica Chastain), who redefines "twisted sister." Del Toro is a master of things that go bump in the night and fester inside.

Truth
OCTOBER 16TH

ROBERT REDFORD PLAYS CBS News anchor Dan Rather, and Cate Blanchett is his producer Mary Mapes. Rather resigned and Mapes lost her job when they used suspect documents to back up a 2004 piece on *60 Minutes* that challenged then-president George W. Bush's National Guard service. This potent cinematic provocation reopens old wounds in ways you won't see coming.

Brooklyn
NOVEMBER 6TH

IRISH ACTRESS SAOIRSE Ronan, 21, is superb in this ravishing story of love and leaving home. Ronan plays a girl who comes to 1950s America for work and must choose between an attractive stranger (Emory Cohen) and a man she left behind (Domhnall Gleeson). John Crowley's film brims with small pleasures. "I get very emotional about it," says Ronan. You will too.

Spectre
NOVEMBER 6TH

IS "SPECTRE" AN ORIGIN story for James Bond? Director Sam Mendes, who hit pay dirt bonding with Bond in *Skyfall*, says so. And Daniel Craig is up at bat for the fourth time as 007, with Oscar winner Christoph Waltz as his nemesis. Waltz practically oozes out the words "I'm the author of all your pain." How do you resist?

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2
NOVEMBER 20TH

THE END. AT LAST. STUDIO execs have squeezed four movies from three bestselling books by Suzanne Collins. You could feel the padding. But it didn't hurt that much, because *The Hunger Games* remained the class act in a long line of imitation dystopian epics (that's you, *Divergent*). And because Jennifer Lawrence gave her all to playing Katniss, the "futuristic Joan of Arc" (Lawrence's words) who finally gets to go medieval on President Snow (Donald Sutherland). Rock on.

Star Wars: The Force Awakens
DECEMBER 18TH

QUITE SIMPLY, THE MOVIE event of the year. No one knows yet how J.J. Abrams will pick up the saga that ended with *Return of the Jedi*. It's gotta be better than the three George Lucas prequels. We do know Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) is back, and Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher), and Han Solo (Harrison Ford). We know there's a new hero in Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac) and a fresh villain in Kylo Ren (Adam Driver). Chewbacca sums it up best in his immortal Wookie sound: "*Arwwwwwaaaaaaaarrrrrrahahahahahhaahhhhaa….*"

The Hateful Eight
DECEMBER 25TH

AN OCTET OF BADASS OUTlaws. That's how Quentin Tarantino sees *The Hateful Eight*, whose cast includes Samuel L. Jackson, Kurt Russell, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Walton Goggins, Demián Bichir, Tim Roth, Michael Madsen and Bruce Dern. "Trap them in a room with a blizzard outside, give them guns and see what happens," says Tarantino. I'm in. Call it *Reservoir Dogs* in spurs. Tarantino is the cinematic poet of the profane, and every film junkie will saddle up for this one.

The Revenant
DECEMBER 25TH

TALK IS THAT ALEJANDRO G. Iñárritu turned the filming of this revenge Western into a Canadian-wilderness version of *Survivor*. The cast, led by Leonardo DiCaprio as a 19th-century hunter left to die by his pals (Tom Hardy and Domhnall Gleeson), froze their actor pee-pees off. "What good is a happy cast," says Iñárritu, "if the film is a piece of shit?" Point taken. Talk now is that *The Revenant* is a piece of gold, likely to get Iñárritu back on the Oscar stage, where his *Birdman* won Best Picture and Director. That, folks, is what makes fall the film season that counts.

OSCAR BAIT

Fassbender as Steve Jobs

Steve Jobs
Michael Fassbender may finally win an overdue Oscar, for playing the late Apple genius in Danny Boyle's film. The ballsy script, by Aaron Sorkin, tells the core story through the launches of three Apple products. No lazy biopic here – it's all go for broke. *Oct. 9th*

Trumbo
Can Bryan Cranston add an Oscar to his four Emmys for *Breaking Bad*? He's got a juicy role as Dalton Trumbo, a screenwriter who was blacklisted in the 1950s for his Commie politics. Trumbo wrote *Spartacus, Exodus* and other films using a fake name (not Heisenberg) and fought back hard. *Nov. 6th*

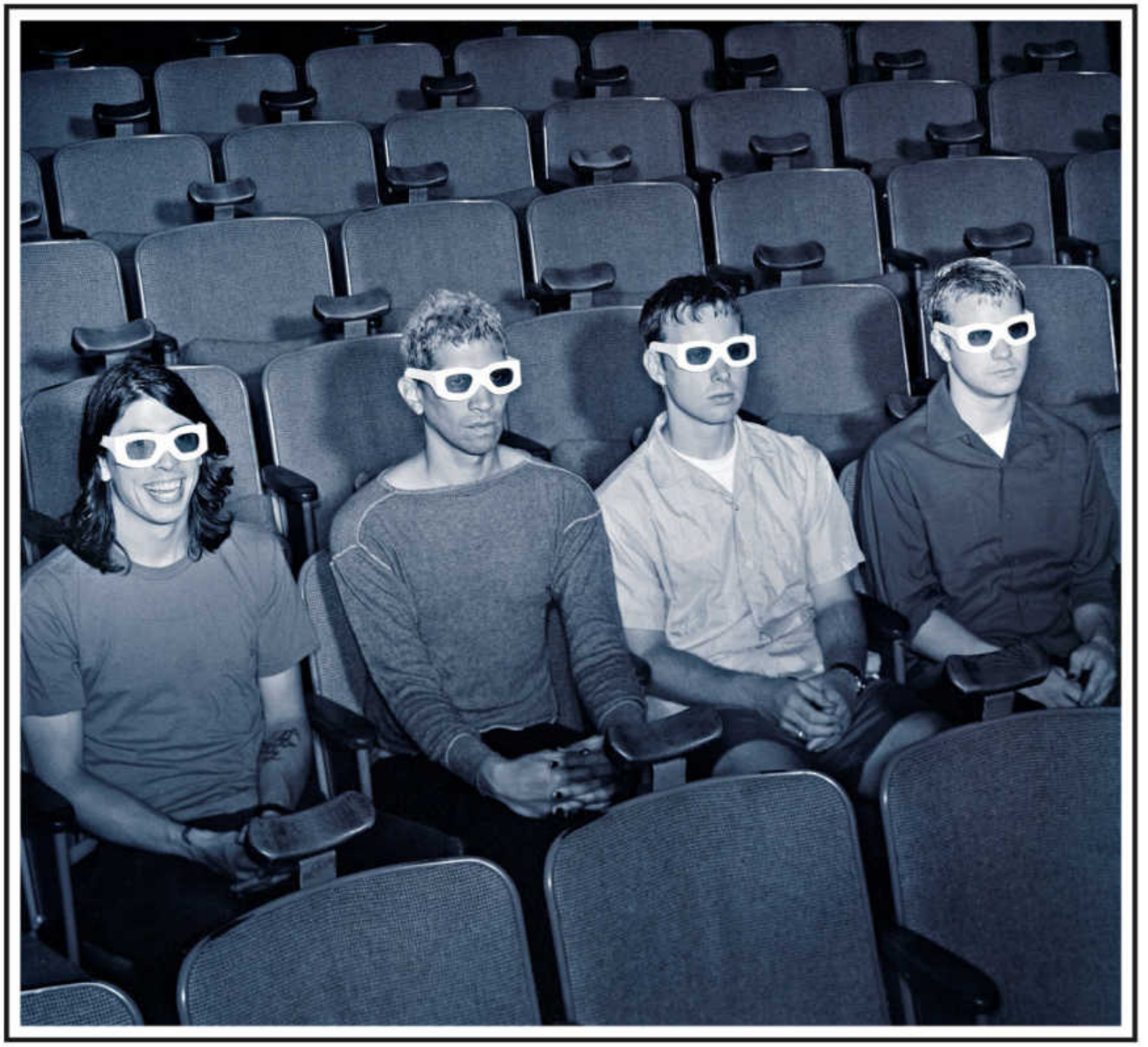
Carol
Picture Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara enjoying a love that dare not speak its name. That's *Carol*, a film set in the 1950s, when lesbianism was a social taboo. Todd Haynes directs from a book Patricia Highsmith had to write under a pseudonym. At Cannes, the magnificent Blanchett and Mara won ovations. You'd be crazy to miss it. *Nov. 20th*

Redmayne as the Danish girl

The Danish Girl
Eddie Redmayne, who just won an Oscar for playing Stephen Hawking in *The Theory of Everything*, could repeat. As a Danish artist who in the 1920s became the first male to make the surgical transition to female, the gifted British actor taps into the zeitgeist. Hello, Caitlyn. *Nov. 27th*

Joy
Jennifer Lawrence lands in the award race when she teams with director David O. Russell (*Silver Linings Playbook, American Hustle*). So expect good things when she plays Joy, a character loosely based on the inventor of the Miracle Mop. "It's the interior life of one woman's soul, from 10 to 40," says Russell. *Dec. 25th*

FROM TOP: UNIVERSAL PICTURES; FOCUS FEATURES



PHOTOGRAPH BY DAN WINTERS. CHART DATA BY "CASHBOX" MAGAZINE

RS 718 OCTOBER 5TH, 1995

Foo Fighters Learn to Fly

ROLLING STONE's Chris Mundy was traveling across the Midwest with former Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl's new band, the Foo Fighters, on their first club tour. "They were just becoming a band," says Mundy. "They hadn't really [all] played together." The group could have afforded a proper bus, but Grohl, guitarist Pat Smear, bassist Nate Mendel and then-drummer William Goldsmith packed into a van. "It was tight quarters," says Mundy. "I think they wanted that bond." Photographer Dan Winters came up with the shoot's 1950s 3D-movie theme ("I made the glasses," he says) – a nod to the mid-20th-century roots of the term "foo fighters," a World War II pilot nickname for UFOs. In later years, Grohl would have some regrets about the moniker: "It's the stupidest fucking band name in the world."

To dive further into five decades of ROLLING STONE archives, go to RollingStone.com/coverwall.

1995: On the Charts

Week of September 30th

1. **"Gangsta's Paradise"** Coolio *MCA Soundtracks*
2. **"Runaway"** Janet Jackson *A&M*
3. **"You Are Not Alone"** Michael Jackson *Epic*
4. **"Fantasy"** Mariah Carey *Columbia*
5. **"Kiss From a Rose"** Seal *ZTT/Sire*
6. **"Only Wanna Be With You"** Hootie and the Blowfish *Atlantic*
7. **"I Got 5 on It"** Luniz *Noo Trybe*
8. **"Boombastic/ In the Summertime"** Shaggy *Virgin*
9. **"Run-Around"** Blues Traveler *A&M*
10. **"I Can Love You Like That"** All-4-One *Blitzz/Atlantic*

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